



Nov 1821

EV 110 --E9-1792--
Evanson, Edward, 1731-1805.
Arguments against and for
the sabbatical observance

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E R R A T A.

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82,	18,	meditation,	mediation
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149,	11,	calenadr,	calendar
157,	26,	<i>dele the at the end of the line and place it at the beginning.</i>	

A
LETTER

TO

Dr. PRIESTLEY's Young Man;

WITH A POSTSCRIPT

CONCERNING

The Rev. D. SIMPSON's ESSAY, &c.

IN ANSWER TO

EVANSON's DISSONANCE AND VOLNEY's RUINS.

By EDWARD EVANSON.

NULLIUS ADDICTUS JURARE IN VERBA MAGISTRI. HOR.
THAT YOUR FAITH SHOULD NOT STAND IN THE WISDOM
OF MEN, BUT IN THE POWER OF GOD. PAUL.

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN, from a strong persuasion of the great importance of the question, I thought it my duty both as a Man and a Christian to submit to public consideration my ideas of the *Dissonance of the four generally received Evangelists*, conscious that I stood alone, unsupported by the opinions of any learned theologians ancient or modern, and well convinced, by going to the very source of the argument myself, that all the *external* evidence which the case admits is so scanty and defective, that though men of great abilities and ingenuity may declaim much and write volumes and volumes upon the subject, it is not possible for them to prove the authenticity of any of the evangelical histories, upon that ground only, to the satisfaction of any candid, unprejudiced mind, I expressed my hopes, *that, if any Gentleman should attempt a refutation of my arguments, he would effect it *in a manly, rational manner, by clearly reconciling the several objectionable passages, as the scriptures really exist, without recurring to any human authority or to conjectures unwarranted by the Gospels themselves.*

Instead of complying with this reasonable request, however, Dr. Priestley, in the letters
to

* Preface, p. 6.

to which I have replied in the following pages, has thought fit to recur to hardly anything else. He has endeavoured principally to overpower me by the mere *human authority* of the names of Serapion, Origen, Eusebius, Jerom, Austin, Jones, Lardner, Michaelis and himself; and has invidiously represented me as pretending to greater sagacity than all the commentators of so many centuries: whereas, God knows, I pretend to nothing but common sense and common honesty and such a degree of learning as, I am happy and thankful to be conscious, enables me to investigate for myself all the records that are accessible to writers of superior talents; and to form as just a judgment of the case as it is in their power to do. If I have any advantage, it is only this, that having been induced many years ago, by a train of peculiar circumstances to abandon entirely not only the established church but the clerical profession, and having ever since kept myself unconnected with every religious sect or party, I have perhaps viewed the same objects in a more impartial, disinterested light, than it is possible for men of the clerical order, of any denomination, to view them in.

The motives which had led me to such an investigation I fully explained in my preface; and stated the particular prophecies of the Apostle Paul, which compared with other prophecies of the Gospel, that have already received their completion, seem to make it as
certain

certain as that the word of God is true, that several of the canonical scriptures of the *orthodox* Church of Constantine must be fabulous and false. And since the Doctor has quoted* the last sentence I here allude to, he must have read that preface. Yet he passes by what I have there urged as the *inevitable consequence* of St. Paul's predictions, without the least notice of any kind. And instead of paying the slightest attention to the account I have there given of myself, he has thought proper to declare, "that it does not appear by what particular train of thought I was originally led to entertain the doubts which produced the work he animadverts on," and therefore, amuses himself and his readers with inventing motives for my conduct and accounting for my work in *his* manner. But, however superior Dr. Priestley may be to me in other kinds of knowledge, I must insist upon it, that I understand what are the perceptions and workings of my own mind better than he does: and still abide by that account of the matter, which I have before given, as the only faithful and true one, though it happens to be materially different from Dr. Priestley's.

The Doctor blames and very pathetically laments the ungrateful rudeness and insult with which I have *turned three old friends out of doors*, and hopes his affectionate defence of them

* Letter iii. p. 40.

them will recommend *him* to the favour of their holy authors. But, if he had not been too much shocked and offended with my indecent behaviour to retain any sentiment of candour towards me, he would for one moment, at least, have put himself in *my* situation and considered that, whatever *he* might think of those writings, instead of friends they appeared to *me* to be palpable cheats and impostors, who under the disguise of friendship were deceiving and defrauding myself and the whole human family in affairs of the utmost importance to us.

It is a common English proverb that *extremes frequently meet*. Yet surely it is not possible that the philosophic, protestant, unitarian Dr. Priestley should ever form a coalition with the orthodox Roman-Catholic. There are some circumstances, however, which seem to make it not improbable, that were it not for the doctrines of the trinity and transubstantiation, and the use of the surplice, the Doctor would make a very good Roman-Catholic priest. His hypothesis of a posthumous state of discipline to correct and purify the dispositions of the vicious part of mankind, after they have ceased to be men, has always appeared to me very similar to the purgatory of the Church of Rome. And the representation he has given of the late Dr. Price*, as interesting himself since his death in the concerns of this world

* See his sermon on his death.

world and pleased with the gradually augmenting packets of news, which his surviving auditors are to carry him, as they die in their turns, together with the earnest desire he expresses, by defending their supposed writings against my indecent attacks, to gain the approbation of Matthew, Mark and John, seems to argue that he admits also, with the same church, an intermediate state of paradise for the souls of the good and virtuous. When I find him placing implicit and unlimited confidence in the decisions of *the Church*, and the testimony of its *Christian*, as he calls them, but, as I call them, *Antichristian* Fathers; and by declaring * *our Faith in the Gospel history to be independent of the authenticity of any books*, referring every thing ultimately to the oral tradition of *the Church*, methinks I hear the language of another learned Cardinal. And when he takes pains to irritate the passions and instigate against me the angry resentment of the bigotted and superstitious, by repeated accusations of such indecent levity as must shock the feelings of my readers, and of such improper ridicule and sarcasm as are more inexcusable in me than in an unbeliever, I can scarce forbear exclaiming in the words of the witty poet,

Hei mihi! si fueris tu LEO§, qualis eris!

After all, why should Dr. Priestley or any other reader be so violently hurt and offended; and

* Preface, p. 10. § Pope, as Cæsar is used for Emperor.

and experience such *unpleasing feelings* on account of a performance which he tells the public is so trifling, weak and groundless; which he assures us, at present, makes no impression upon (for so I understand *does not stagger*) the learned; and which he confidently predicts, “after sometime will have no more effect than Mr. Whiston’s new canon of the New Testament?” I too could prophecy— But, as we neither of us lay claim to *plenary inspiration*, I am persuaded we shall both act more wisely in supporting our opinions by fair reasoning and satisfactory demonstration, than in advancing mere, though confident, assertions respecting the past, the present or the future.

The Doctor has closed his preface with an apology, which was quite unnecessary, for depending upon Lardner and Michaelis for his quotations from the *Christian Fathers*. I only wish with all my heart, that the loss of that *paternal* collection had been the greatest injury he had sustained by the infamous riot at Birmingham. But I am astonished at such a prodigy of *filial affection*; and find myself utterly at a loss to conceive how any man of learning and common sense could have been occupied in collecting the Fathers of the Church, even supposing him to have taken the Mothers into the bargain, for MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS!!!

A LETTER

A

LETTER

TO

DOCTOR PRIESTLEY'S

YOUNG MAN.

SIR,

AS Dr. Priestley informs us you represent all the *young persons* who may happen to read *my treatise on the Diffonance of the four generally received Evangelists*, I know not how he can have attained the *happines of finding* “that, in his former letters, he was able to give you satisfaction, in his reply to my objections” against the observance of Sunday as a Sabbath; but I am well pleased to find he thinks so; because, I assure you, he gave me entire satisfaction also, by conceding the only point I ever thought worth contending for, viz. *that the observance of a Sabbath is not a duty of the Christian Religion*. For you recollect, Sir, that in those letters he says, * “every man should be left at perfect liberty to work or rest (on the Lord’s day) as he pleases,” and that in his opinion, “harvest work ought not to be neglected on that day, in our uncertain climate.” That were he a minister amongst
B farmers,

* Pages 57 and 58.

farmers, he would adopt the plan, I proposed to be pursued at all times, of having “public worship early in the morning and late in the evening, and exhort his hearers to make the most of the middle part of the day, in taking care of their hay and corn.” Now, Sir, however young you may be, you must be sensible, that whatever right farmers have to break through the customary sabbatical rest in one season of the year, for their peculiar profit or convenience, the very same right have they and every order of men to employ the leisure hours of Sunday for similar purposes in every season of the year, without the licence of their preacher or a bull of indulgence from any Doctor either of England or Rome. That, therefore, by the Doctor’s own confession, the observance of a sabbath amongst Christians is an institution of mere superstition, not an ordinance of the Christian religion; for if it were the latter, no man could have the authority to violate or dispense with it on any occasion. And as it never was, and I am confident never will be observed in any nation, where it is not considered as a religious duty, I look upon the argument between us, on that subject, as fairly brought to a conclusion* : for as to a few obstinately perverted quotations and misrepresentations of facts, as well as his personal abuse of myself, they are not, of themselves, deserving the least notice.

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* To go at once to the fountain of all law, there are only two original rules of action, the law of nature, and that of revelation. The first is universal, eternal and immutable, rising out of the nature of things, which because they are, are under natural and necessary obligations. The laws of revelation are positive, and are to be obeyed precisely as they are enjoined: those given to individuals, by individuals, and by no body else: those given occasionally, on those occasions, and on no other in the world: those given to the Jews, by the Jews, and by no other people under heaven: those given for a time, for that period, and for no other: those given to the Apostles,

In the first of his letters to you part the second and the first appendix, the Doctor combats what I have advanced respecting the nature of the evidence arising from miracles in general and from those recorded in the evangelical histories in particular. But before I reply to his arguments on that subject, it is necessary to point out to you a gross misrepresentation of what I have said, even according to his own quotation from my book. How it should have so happened, I pretend not to determine; but in the following pages I shall have occasion to observe to you many instances of a similar kind. P. 5, He tells you that I say “the evidence of miracles is not to be depended upon, *because they make a considerable part of the narration, the truth of which is questioned.*” Yet if you turn back to his own extract from my book, p. 3, you will see that my words are, that “*the miraculous acts there and there only related cannot prove the truth and authenticity of those histories, because the authority and credibility of the histories must be firmly established before the miracles contained in them can reasonably be admitted as real facts.*” When therefore he argues that “if the narrative be sufficiently authenticated, the truth of the miracles is as well established as that of any other facts,” &c. He is not contending with me, but with a phantom of his own imagination.

In the very next paragraph, he tells you that I
say,

by the Apostles, who have no successors: and those given to all Christians, by all Christians, and for the reasons assigned by the lawgiver, and for no other in the world.....Robinson's Ecclesiastical Researches, p. 141, 142.

An argument stated with remarkable neatness, perspicuity and irrefragable strength, which at once overthrows, as effectually as if the author had written a thousand volumes for the purpose, the observance of a Sabbath under the Gospel; a Priesthood elevated above and distinguished from the people; and every other religious ordinance which is not expressly enjoined in the authentic scriptures of the New Testament.

say, "miracles could only be designed to *excite attention*, till the proof of completed prophecy can be applied." Whereas his own extract will convince you, that I have said, they were not only intended *to gain the new religion attention from the world*, but also *to be a present testimony of its divine origin and authority*. So that his argument in that and the succeeding paragraphs upon that single proposition is what I have no concern with.

Both the Doctor and I publicly avow our sincere belief and firm conviction of the truth of the divine revelation by Jesus Christ. The great difference is the foundation on which we have built our respective conviction and belief. For my part, finding that all the historic evidence existing, except those scriptures which compose the volume of what is called the New Testament, consists of the writings of a series of men, who are all of them either the Fathers or interested Sons of a Church, whose superstition is an evident apostacy from and contradiction to the pure and plain and beneficial religion of the Gospel; perceiving them all, from Justin Martyr to the Roman-Catholic apostle St. Austin, to be grossly superstitious, credulous and fabulous, and most of them calumniating the individuals of the several sects of professed Christians, who differed from them, with equal malice, uncharitableness and falsehood; the testimony of such writers and such historians afforded no satisfaction to my mind, upon any point in which their own cause or, which is the same thing, that of their church is interested, as it certainly is in the canon of the Christian Scriptures, which their, at length, predominant sect thought proper to select and authorize. Observing also from St. Paul's mode of preaching the

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the Gospel to the Corinthians§, that the faith of a wise and rational christian ought to *stand not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God*, without relying upon the wisdom and sagacity of Michaelis, Jones, Lardner, Mosheim, the reformers from Popery, the learned Roman-Catholic writers, or upon the superstitious folly and falsehood or, as it is sometimes called, *the pious fraud* of the Fathers of the Church, I turned my attention more especially to the only supernatural proof of the actual interposition of the Deity in the establishment of revealed religion, which remains clear of doubts and distrust, as depending not at all upon the truth and infallibility of erring, deceived and deceitful man, but solely on *the power of God*. I mean the testimony of prophecy. Here, Sir, I think that God whom I faithfully endeavour to serve, I perceived a foundation for my faith in Jesus perfectly firm, secure and satisfactory: and have built it accordingly upon this *rock*. Dr. Priestley, on the contrary, thinking slightly of the evidence derived from completed prophecy, as indeed he must do, since he asserts* that an apostle of Jesus Christ, under the fresh and immediate influence of divine inspiration, could *evidently misapply* the prophecies of the old covenant, has chosen to found his christian faith upon the historic evidence of a series of, at least, fallible writers from Serapion to Michaelis. His faith, therefore, is so far from *standing in the power of God*, that, with him, even the certainty of any miraculous display of *the power of God* depends entirely upon the truth and infallibility of human wisdom and perception. He accordingly tells you, † that “the proper and universally satisf-

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§ 1 Cor. ii. 5.

* P. 46.

† P. 4.

factory evidence of all past events, miraculous as well as others, is the testimony of persons who were eye-witnesses to them." And, "that the evidence of the truth of christianity is of this satisfactory kind," &c. Again, † "It is not because four persons though the most unexceptionable evidences assert that Christ and his Apostles wrought miracles, that we believe the facts. We believe them on the evidence of the thousands and tens of thousands, themselves well acquainted with the facts, by whom *it cannot be denied* that the contents of these books were credited." Again, p. 12, speaking of the books of the New Testament, he says, "they were published in the lifetime of thousands and myriads, who were as competent witnesses of the facts as the writers themselves," &c. And in his appendix, p. 167, he intimates that our belief of *the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, with their passage through the red sea*, depends upon the same kind of conviction that we have for our belief of *the invasion of Greece by Xerxes*. Now, Sir, how your mind may be constituted I know not; but to mine facts of different natures, to render them credible, require very different kinds of testimony. With respect to Xerxes's invasion of Greece, as the Greek historians, who have recorded it, could have no supposable motive to falsify as to the main fact itself, though they might in some of their embellishments of the story, and as the truth or falsehood of it is of no kind of consequence to me, I readily acquiesce in a persuasion that it really did take place; though I do not give implicit credit to every extraordinary circumstance, with which the story is related. But for the miraculous

† P. 7 and 8.

culous facts recorded of the Exodus of the Israelites, were it not for *the testimony* which *the spirit of prophecy* bears to the general truth of the Pentateuch and the divine authority of the Jewish religion, I should have referred them to the same class with the *Romulus et Remus* of the Romans, and all those wonderful circumstances which are said to have attended the origin of every other nation recorded in ancient history, and which, I should imagine not even Dr. Priestley himself can give credit to.

Upon the strength of the historic evidence he has thus stated to you, the Doctor, in an assumed tone of pious solemnity, assures you (p. 179) that he believes and regards with reverence those miracles peculiar to the Gospel attributed to St. Matthew, which I reject as incredible. And since his capacity of belief is large enough to admit also the miraculous history of Jonah in the whale's belly, one must conclude that he believes too the story of Balaam's ass speaking and reasoning with her rider. Be so good then as to ask this Doctor of easy faith, whether he believes the African miracle so strongly and judiciously stated by Mr. Gibbon, that a number of the orthodox, whose tongues their inhuman Arian antagonists had cut out, spoke distinctly and perfectly well, after that cruel operation, without any tongues at all? Since, as he tells you, *human nature has been the same in all ages*; and (p. 6) that "if the evidence of *sight* was sufficient to convince the spectators that the miracles were real, a sufficient evidence that those spectators were convinced, that is the evidence of *testimony*, can be all that is necessary to convince others; for this places them *precisely in the situation of those*

2269

who were the spectators:" he certainly, according to his own principles, ought to believe it; because the fact was attested by great numbers of eye and ear-witnesſes, both in Africa and at Conſtantinople, whoſe *teſtimony* is recorded not only in the writings of private individuals, but even in the public annals of the eaſtern empire. Now, notwithſtanding all this *evidence of teſtimony*, I really find myſelf *ſo conſtituted*, that I cannot believe it. And I am ſtrongly inclined to think, that Dr. Prieſtley, in this inſtance, is as incredulous as myſelf. Yet, Sir, *the evidence of teſtimony* to the truth of the miracle of Balaam's aſs is far leſs ſatisſactory. For, from the circumſtances of the ſtory, it does not appear, that any perſon was ſenſible of the fact except Balaam and the aſs herſelf; and they have neither of them left any written account of the tranſaction: or if the prophet's ſervants and the meſſengers of Balak were alſo ear-witnesſes of the wonderful fact, they were very few indeed in compariſon of thoſe who attested the African miracle. Beſides they were all Midianites or Moabites, who at that time were hostile to and had no communication with the Jews. Yet it is a Jewish hiſtory alone, in which that *ſingular* miracle is recorded.

Ask him alſo, Sir, as a philoſopher, whether he really believes that the ſun and moon ſtood ſtill at the command of Joſhua? in order for the firſt even to ſeem to do ſo, he knows that the rapid diurnal revolution of the earth, at the rate of a thouſand miles an hour, muſt have been inſtantly arreſted and our globe have continued motionleſs for the ſpace of twelve hours. Ask him then, what effects he imagines the ſudden ſtop and as ſudden return to ſuch a violent motion from a ſtate of reſt
would

would have had upon every thing and creature upon the surface of the whole earth? And, if he believes the Almighty was as eager for the extirpation of the Amorites as Joshua himself, whether it be not more probable, that he would have destroyed them by lightening, earthquakes or various other modes of destruction, at all times in his power, and not unfrequent in the ordinary course of his providence, than that he should have hearkened to so mad and ignorant a request; arrested the career of the planet we inhabit, and miraculously counteracted the shocks which such a violent double change must have naturally occasioned on its surface; only to gratify the Jewish General with the pleasure of butchering his flying enemies twelve hours longer than day-light would have otherwise permitted him to enjoy?

Be pleased also to observe, Sir, that amongst the miraculous facts recorded in the scriptures there are some, which a wary, reflecting, unprejudiced mind might not unreasonably consider as only uncommon effects of human skill, or the mere illusions of what the ancients denominated the *magic art*, cunning artifice and a kind of dexterous legerdemain. For the very same *evidence of testimony* which assures us of the miracles wrought by Moses to prevail upon Pharaoh to dismiss the Israelites, assures us likewise that, in the three first instances, the Egyptian magicians performed the same: and therefore it is highly probable that their king supposed Moses and Aaron to be only magicians of superior skill. There are others, which might be suspected of being only the accidental effects of natural causes sagaciously observed and artfully misrepresented as the immediate interposition of

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divine power, to answer the purposes of the chief actor of the history. Of this kind are the extraordinary flight of quails, the supply of manna, the destruction of Korah and his factious party, and some others. Nay Josephus, though a Jew, labours to account for the passage of the Israelites through the red sea by the favourable concurrence of natural circumstances, which happened at that time to occasion a temporary dry path in that part of the channel; and intimates that similar circumstances have been known repeatedly to produce similar effects, in other places, since the time of Moses.

Now, Sir, with all these rational causes of doubt and uncertainty, considering farther that the human species taken collectively has acquired its present extensive knowledge by slow degrees and through the accumulating experience of a long succession of ages; that therefore all human records of far distant times are records of ages of ignorance, which in their very nature are ever ages of credulity; and that it is, in many cases, impossible for us to determine how far it was the interest of the human agent in the supposed miracle to deceive the people, or of those who composed the histories to favour that deception by appearing to believe the fact themselves; I leave it to you to judge whether the miraculous facts alone recorded in any ancient history, especially where the authenticity of the history itself is not clearly and satisfactorily demonstrated upon other grounds, can furnish a proper and secure foundation to any rational mind for a belief in a supernatural revelation from heaven? and whether, according to the plain dictates of reason, the faith of every professed Christian, which is built only upon
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the ground of the Doctor's *evidence of testimony*, does not stand upon a doubtful, insecure foundation exactly similar to that of the belief of those devout Catholics, who are as firmly convinced of the truth of the African miracle of the tongueless orators and of the wonders wrought at the tomb of Matthew of Paris or at the shrine of our Thomas a Becket, as Dr. Priestley can be of the story of Balaam's ass, Joshua's sun and moon, Jonah's whale or the wonders peculiarly recorded in the Gospel attributed to St. Matthew.

With respect to the thousands and myriads who received the Gospels, because they were eye-witnesses of and as well acquainted with the miraculous facts as the apostolic authors themselves, it is astonishing that even a professional Divine, in any place but his pulpit where he is secure from contradiction, should presume to carry the usual technical cant and declamation to such an absurd extravagance of hyperbole! Why, Sir! Young as you are, you must have learned from the four evangelical histories themselves, that to some of the miraculous facts they relate the Apostles alone could be witnesses; that the most public of them could be seen only by part of the inhabitants of Palestine, chiefly in Galilee or in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem: and that of those crowds who followed our Saviour and were witnesses to many of his wonderful acts, whether they consisted of thousands or of myriads, so very few were effectually convinced by them of the divine power and authority of his commission, that, after his death, the whole number of those who believed in him amounted only to one hundred and twenty; and of that small number many were dead before the year sixty-two, the date
which

which Dr. Priestley allots for the publication of the earliest of those histories. Where then are *the thousands and tens of thousands themselves well acquainted with the facts*, who can have furnished the world with this so boasted *universally satisfactory evidence of testimony*? Nay, the most important of all the miracles of the Gospel, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead, we are expressly told by an Apostle himself, was not manifested to the people in general, but only to a few chosen witnesses who eat and drank and conversed with him for many days after his resurrection to life. If therefore the temporal interests of the first disciples of Jesus Christ had been promoted by the propagation of the religion of the new covenant, as those of the clerical order of professed Christians of every denomination have evidently been by that establishment of the apostate Church, which was strongly contended for by all the *Fathers* of the third century, and by the interposition of the civil power unhappily accomplished in the fourth, their evidence would have been of no weight at all.

But I persuade myself I can convince you, Sir, not only from the dictates of human reason but from the voice of revelation also, that miracles, of themselves, do not afford even to the spectators a sufficiently firm and satisfactory foundation for their religious faith.

The Doctor indeed has quoted Exodus xix. 9.* to prove the direct contrary; and (though he censures me for understanding the writer of the Gospel attributed to St. Matthew by *everlasting* to mean eternal *punishment*) merely from the expression *for ever*, in our English translation, infers that the declared

* Appendix p. 167.

clared purpose of God's manifesting himself to the Israelites by a preternatural voice, at the tremendous vision of Mount Sinai, was to convince not only the spectators and auditors but *all succeeding generations*: and says, that this miracle hath actually proved and ever will prove sufficient to confirm the faith of every generation of Jews from that day to the end of time. Now to me, Sir, the obvious and only meaning of that sentence appears to be, that the intent of the Deity in displaying that miraculous, terrific scene to the whole people of the Jews, was to give them, in a most striking manner, the only kind of *instantaneous* proof that could be given them of his actual communication with Moses, that they might be induced *always*, that is, during his whole ministry and mediation to hearken to the commands which God should dictate to him and believe them to be indeed the commands of the Almighty. But, instead of producing the *never failing* effect that the Doctor tells you of, the very history of the Jews immediately subsequent to that awful vision furnishes the strongest proof that can be adduced of any thing, that no miracles are, of themselves, sufficient to work a lasting conviction and to make a proper impression upon the minds of mankind in general. For the whole adult generation, who were spectators of and terrified at such a wonderful manifestation of supernatural power, proved so rebellious and disobedient to the divine ordinances enjoined by Moses, and so continually and generally apostatized from the service of the true God to the worship of idols, that, in punishment, they were condemned to wander in the wilderness till they all died, that none of them might inherit the blessings of the promised

mitted land. Nor did their posterity ever continue steadfast in the Mosaic faith, for any long period of time, from their settlement in Palestine to their captivity by the king of Babylon. So little, Sir, must you regard the mere confident assertions and rhetorical declamation of any polemic Divine!

If, from Dr. Priestley's letters, you will with me turn to the book of Deuteronomy, you will find that Moses from the beginning of the twelfth chapter, is giving the Jews particular directions for their civil and religious conduct after their settlement in the land of Canaan and the perfect establishment of their ritual worship by the building of the temple at Jerusalem, * *the place which the Lord their God would chuse to cause his name to dwell there.* And that in the beginning of the thirteenth chapter he cautions them against being seduced by any pretended prophet or soothsayer to exchange their religion for that of any other people in the world; not even if the prophet should give them a sign or miracle and the sign or miracle should actually be performed: for that, in such a case, God would only permit them to be deluded and deceived, to prove whether they were dutiful and firmly attached to him. In the very same manner Christians under the Gospel are cautioned by the Apostle against the speedily ensuing apostasy from the religion of Christ to that of Antichrist, though the latter was to be established by means of § *power and signs and false miracles and every mode of wicked deceit.* If then the miracles of the Egyptian magicians appeared to the spectators to be as certainly wrought as those of Aaron and Moses; if the Jews are commanded by God himself not to trust the miracles wrought

* Deut. xii. 12.

§ 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10.

wrought by any pretended prophet, because they might be deceived; if all the European nations into which the western Roman empire was to be divided were, for several centuries, to believe the gross fictions and absurd fables of the Antichristian apostasy, in consequence of their delusion by pretended supernatural power, and *lying signs and wonders*; with what satisfaction can any rational mind confide in the mere testimony of even the miracles which a man himself sees? Much less in the truth of such as are recorded only in books delivered down through the medium and by the selection and approbation of writers, who were all of them either authors or dupes of those false miracles and *pious frauds* by which the predicted apostasy hath been accomplished.

This, Sir, being the case with miracles, you will not wonder that the Deity, by his prophets both of the old covenant and the new, when he lays down the criterion by which we may distinguish the true from a false religion, never makes the least mention of miracles, nor of Dr. Priestley's *proper and universally satisfactory evidence of testimony* concerning them; but, as I have shewn in the sixth and following pages of my *Dissonance*, refers us solely to the testimony of completed prophecy: which he would not have done if any other had been necessary or to be depended upon with equal certainty and satisfaction of mind §.

You

§ Dr. Priestley indeed, in his appendix, p. 168, has thought fit to allege a passage from the Gospel according to St. John, c. v. in which our Saviour appeals only to miracles and human testimony, without mentioning prophecy, for the proof of his divine mission. It is a mode of arguing both new and curious to quote a passage from a controverted book itself to prove its own authenticity. But I think myself much obliged to the Doctor for remarking another palpable contradiction to the tenor of the best authenticated scriptures both Jewish and Christian, in addition to the many I have pointed out in that evidently spurious Gospel.

You will now, Sir, perhaps be convinced that this argument of the Doctor respecting the proper foundation of religious faith is not a dispute with such a capricious, weak caviller, as he again and again assures you I am, but with the supreme Deity himself: and you are to determine which party it is fittest for you to side with.

In truth, God hath never rested the credit of his supernatural revelation to his creatures upon mere miracles alone, even to those spectators of them who were chiefly intended to be convinced of its truth and certainty: but many of his greatest miracles themselves have been made the wonderful completion of a preceding prophecy. Thus the inefficacy of the miracles wrought by Moses and Aaron and of all the plagues inflicted upon Egypt to induce Pharaoh to dismiss the Israelites, until the destruction of the first-born, was predicted to Moses when in Midian and by him to Pharaoh and his own countrymen. He predicted also to the Israelites the utter destruction of the Egyptian host, in that very passage of the red sea through which they escaped. He foretold them, that the same manna which gathered upon any other day would keep uncorrupted barely one day, collected on the sixth day of the week would continue good two days; and that there would be none upon the ground on the seventh day, because God had ordained their resting within their tents on that day to be a sign of the covenant he was about to make with them. He predicted also the new and peculiar manner in which God would punish the rebellion of Korah and his faction before it took place, &c. &c. In like manner, under the revelation of the new covenant, our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem;

Jerusalem; the place and peculiar mode of his death; his resurrection on the third day; the effusion of the holy inspiration on the day of Pentecost; the persecuted state of his apostles and first disciples; and the destruction of the metropolis and polity of the Jews; are all completions of so many distinct prophecies, which, conjoined with the accomplishment of many Jewish prophecies in his person, conduced more satisfactorily and effectually than all his miraculous acts stedfastly to confirm the faith of his primitive disciples from his crucifixion to the end of their lives.

It is natural, Sir, that the minds of men should be more effectually convinced by that kind of evidence which is calculated to afford complete satisfaction to their own reason, than by that which the slightest suspicion of the intervention of extraordinary human skill or dexterity, of the deception of the senses of themselves or other spectators, or of a due degree of information or veracity in the compilers of history must necessarily render dubious and uncertain. It is by no means, therefore, contrary to nature, as hath been asserted, that the nation of the Jews, notwithstanding the numerous miracles recorded in their history and the occasional supernatural interposition of divine power of which they themselves were witnesses, should not have been preserved from imitating the examples of the surrounding nations and continually apostatizing to idolatry whilst in their own kingdom; and yet that, upon their so forcibly feeling the severe completion of the prophecies in their Babylonish captivity, they should then have been thoroughly convinced of the truth and divine origin and authority of the Mosaic covenant, and from that time

to this have maintained a fixed aversion to every species of idolatry and persevered in the worship of the only true God. And, since, similar causes always produce similar effects, I have not the least doubt that, though the historic evidence of the miracles of the Gospel, which Dr. Priestley affirms to be so all-sufficient, has been unable to prevent the almost universal apostasy of professed Christians from the rational religion of the Gospel to an idolatrous, absurd, blasphemous superstition and to preserve more than a very small remnant of pure Christian faith within the whole extent of Christendom, yet the now fast approaching completion of the unaccomplished Christian prophecies will *severely* enforce a conviction of the certainty and divine authority of the new covenant as preached by Jesus and his Apostles, and reclaim the world to a degree of wisdom, social virtue and happiness which no nation hath hitherto experienced.

If then, Sir, the contemptible light in which the celebrated Dr. Priestley has held me out to you, from the motto of his title page to his concluding appendix, will permit you to pay any regard to a writer of my humble obscurity, permit me, as your sincere friend and well-wisher, to advise you not to pin your religious faith upon the wisdom or the folly, the falsehood or the veracity of any number of fallible and erring men; but to fix it upon the same firm, secure basis that I have done, the power of God displayed in the testimony of completed prophecy. I recommend this to you the more earnestly, not merely as the best way of attaining a full and satisfactory conviction of the certainty of revealed religion, but also as the only means of acquiring just ideas of what Christianity

is. For, though out of the myriads of the privileged order of clergy of the different and discordant churches established and sects tolerated within the British empire, I know not one who pretends to be able to give a rational, satisfactory explanation of the prophecies of the Gospel, I am bold to assert, that without a competent understanding of those particular, important passages of scripture, so far as they have already been fulfilled and consistent general ideas of the purport of those which still remain to be accomplished, it is not possible for themselves to understand properly the nature and intent of that Gospel which they are maintained avowedly and solely to teach to others. Indeed your own reason, if you will consult it without prejudice and partiality, will inform you that a just conception of the meaning of those predictions, which describe the very circumstances wherein the culpable errors and deviations of the fatal apostasy consist, and which lead us to the knowledge and expectation of the final accomplishment of the great benevolent scheme of divine providence in the establishment of the Christian covenant with mankind, must necessarily elucidate and explain the nature and intent of that revelation of God's will to a degree absolutely unattainable by any other means in our power.

Having thus, Sir, endeavoured to vindicate myself against the Doctor's animadversions upon what I had advanced respecting the great and essential difference between the evidence deduced by learned and rhetorical arguments from the historic testimony of miracles and that which arises to the mind from an attentive contemplation of the prophecies and a comparison of them with the corresponding

responding events, I proceed to consider what he has asserted in favour of the canon of the Christian scriptures and particularly of the three gospels, which I have seen cause to reject out of my creed.

He begins his second letter to you with an extract out of my book, preceded by a curious remark, that "I seem not to consider that the authenticity of my favourite Gospel of Luke rests on the very same foundation with that of the other Gospels." You, Sir, I hope understand me better than Dr. Priestley appears to do. But I suppose his misapprehension of my argument and this remark proceed from the strong persuasion he writes under of the all-sufficiency of historical evidence, which in his opinion stands in need of no confirmation by evidence of any other kind; and therefore he does not take any other into the account. I assure you, however, that in this important discussion I have no *favourite* but truth: and that the sole cause of the preference I have given to the histories of Luke was that, after having "frequently considered every passage of them all with that attention," with which he tells* you I have acknowledged myself to have considered a particular passage of the Gospel said to be John's, I found more of my *favourite* and much more of probability and consistency in them than in any or all the other.

Of the veracity of the Doctor's assertion concerning the early period at which the books that compose our present canon of scripture were read in Christian congregations I will leave you to judge when I come to give a concise reply to all his general arguments on that subject. But let us first take notice of the authorities he has produced, for
what

* Appendix p. 169.

what he has thought fit to affirm with so much confidence. For by his manner of giving you quotations out of books, as if they were to pass not only for argument but even for proof and demonstration, he seems to attribute to every writer of renown greater infallibility than even Catholics allow to the Pope.

In page 13, he quotes Eusebius to fix the precise date at which Papias wrote and to inform you that he "was acquainted with the daughters of Philip." Now these three ladies, being mentioned in the Acts as prophetesses and consequently at that time not infants, must have been pretty antiquated virgins in the year 116. I do not however object to the Doctor's introducing them on that account; for I would just as soon build my faith in revealed religion upon what they or any other old women might tell us, as I would upon the tradition of Papias or even of Eusebius himself. But the Doctor does not say what was the result of Papias's intercourse with these old ladies. He only tells you that this very Papias "mentions the Gospel of Matthew" without mentioning "any dispute about it:" "*so that,*" adds the Doctor, "*there cannot be any reason to doubt, that the Gospel which we now have that bears his name, was the same that we now have, and as it was originally published.*" What a wonderful adept must your friend the Doctor be in the art of Logic! Did you ever read or hear of so masterly a syllogism? I frankly confess I never met with one like it. What close connection between the major and minor propositions! What perspicuity and irresistible conviction in the consequence! For my part, I am too forcibly impressed by it to attempt any kind of reply.

But

But you will perhaps wonder why the Doctor, who, upon almost every other occasion, has either referred to the page or quoted the words of his author, has not told you in this case what the words of Papias are said to have been. I will supply this deficiency, Sir, and then you will be no longer at a loss to account for this singular omission.

The words of Papias quoted by Eusebius * are *Matthew composed a writing of the oracles* (meaning without doubt the doctrines of the Gospel) *in the Hebrew language: and every one interpreted them as he was able.* You will be pleased to observe, Sir, on what slight grounds the Doctor has ventured to say that, from the manner in which Eusebius tells us Papias mentioned the Gospel of Matthew, "it appears there was not then any dispute about it." Surely the utmost that can reasonably be inferred from it is that, Papias himself made no dispute about it. But perhaps he was little able to form any judgment concerning it; because his concluding words seem very strongly to imply that neither he himself nor many of his acquaintance were capable of reading the language in which it was written. At least, so far as his testimony goes, it is positive evidence that the Gospel which Matthew was said to have written, was written in hebrew; and that in the year 116, there was no translation of it into greek: consequently, that this Gospel could not then be read *in all Christian Churches*, as the Doctor repeatedly affirms they all were, even in the first century; because few of any congregation could have read or understood one word of it.

This observation may serve to convince you, Sir, of what you will be still more convinced, if you pay

* Hist. Eccl. l. iii. c. 39.

pay the attention they deserve to the annotations of the learned, candid and judicious translator of Michaelis, that the uncommon industry and great erudition of that worthy and ingenious German Professor have too often been misapplied in endeavouring to establish error for real fact; of which his maintaining that translations of the *New Testament* existed in the first century is one very striking instance.

In direct opposition to this evidence of Papias confirmed by that of every other early writer Dr. Priestley informs you, p. 43, that Dr. Lardner and he are both *of opinion that this Gospel bears no marks of a translation*: (in which I perfectly agree with them) and that it is most probable that Matthew, like the rest of the apostles, wrote in greek; and that he himself or some one under his inspection translated it into hebrew. This, Sir, is one instance and, as we proceed, I shall have occasion to remark to you other proof that this so boasted, all-sufficient *evidence of testimony* deduced from the traditions of the second century is rejected or admitted by these great critics and commentators just as it serves their present turn: and that, in the hands of professional divines, it is a mere nose of wax, which by means of a little extension or compression they can lengthen or shorten at their pleasure, and fashion after either the *Grecian* or *Roman* model, according to their several tastes. But though such modes of arguing may serve to display their own hardness or ingenuity, I should think they can afford no more satisfaction to any well-informed, unprejudiced mind, than mine has been able to derive from them.

In page 18, the Doctor, to controvert my allegation

gation of the pretended power of working miracles in proof of the "falsehood and deceit of the orthodox christians of early times," is pleased to assert that *it proves nothing but their credulity, and that in one particular respect.* What he can mean by the latter clause of the sentence I know not, because credulity in pretended miracles seems necessarily to imply credulity in all the religious tenets or traditions for the sake of which they are pretended. But I beg, Sir, you will reflect for a moment how it is possible that those early teachers of what they called Christianity, who falsely pretended to the power of working miracles, should be only *credulous*. The people they imposed upon may properly be called credulous; but surely the pretended miracle-mongers themselves must be downright cheats and impostors.

To convince you, however, that my charge of "credulity and falsehood in this case is greatly exaggerated," and, I suppose, at the same time to retaliate upon me for having on a former occasion detected him in either misunderstanding or misrepresenting a passage he had quoted from Tertullian, as relating to the Christian sabbath, he has thought fit to assure you, that I, in my turn, have been guilty of misrepresenting the words of the same author; for that "Tertullian does not say that he knew the fact," of the dead woman lifting up her hands in the posture of prayer, "but only that he was acquainted with the woman, of whom it was related, *scio feminam,*" &c.

This same Tertullian, Sir, is a most unfortunate stumbling block to the learned Doctor. Though he calls you *a young man*, you can hardly be so young as to be below the third form of a grammar

mar school; and if you are not and your master was capable of teaching you the latin language and did his duty, you must have learnt the peculiar distinction of meaning between the verbs *scio* and *novi*, which correspond exactly to the *sçavoir* and *connoître* of the French. You must know therefore that *scio feminam* never could be used by any Latin writer to signify, *I am acquainted with a woman*; and that, when Dr. Priestley relates his Leeds story in Latin and introduces it with saying *scio feminam*, he must excite the same smile in the countenance of every classical scholar that he would do in the faces of his fellow-citizens on the other side of the channel, if he should introduce the same entertaining story in their language with the words *Je sçais une femme*. If the Doctor, having perhaps since the loss of his library been out of the habit of reading Latin, has forgot those idioms of the language which every school-boy is well acquainted with, yet his precipitate eagerness to contradict me on this occasion must surely have quite obscured his understanding; or it could never have escaped him, that no man in his senses would begin a story of a woman long since dead and buried with saying *I am acquainted with such a woman*; he would naturally say *I was*; that therefore if Tertullian had used the word in the same sense in which, it seems, the Doctor himself does when he writes Latin, he could not have used the present tense *scio feminam*. Besides when a sentence begins with, *I am acquainted with a woman*, it must in every language be followed by a relative with a verb of the indicative mode, *a woman who did*, or *of whom it is said that she did*, &c.; but the Doctor could not read over this sentence of Tertullian without seeing that no such relative is used;

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and

and that the verb expressing the lifting up her dead hands is in the infinitive mode depending immediately upon *scio feminam*; that therefore the writer's personal knowledge, that the dead woman raised up her hands, &c. is the only sense of which the words are capable.

You, Sir, without doubt, as I was, are astonished to find a writer who values himself so highly upon his learning and critical skill, capable of either misunderstanding or perverting, in such an unaccountable manner, the obvious, only meaning of so plain and intelligible a sentence. To convince you, therefore, that I do not misstate the case, I have given you in the margin a faithful copy of Tertullian's own words, with the addition of the short sentence immediately preceding, which confirms his personal knowledge of the fact*.

In page 22, the Doctor has been pleased to tell you that, what I have said of the possibility of the Church's having had forty Gospels instead of four if she had chosen to preserve them, "is advanced from mere imagination without even the appearance of any authority." Now Sir you know that Luke assures us, *many* had written evangelical histories before the date of his own, that is within the first thirty years after our Saviour's death. What number then shall we understand by *many*? When I consider that Christian churches were before that

time

* De meo didici. Scio feminam quamdam vernaculam Ecclesiæ, forma et ætate integra functam: post unicum et breve matrimonium; cum in pace dormisset, et morante adhuc sepultura, interim oratione presbyteri componeretur, ad primum halitum orationis manus a lateribus dimotas in habitum supplicem conformasse, rursusque condita pace, situi suo reddidisse. Est et alia relatio apud nostros. In cœmeterio, corpus corpori juxta collocando spatium recessu communicasse.

time founded at Jerusalem, in Samaria, Phenice, Syria, in every province of Asia minor and in many cities of Macedonia and Greece, I cannot think twenty too large a number to be intended by Luke; and, as the very same motives that had induced those authors to write their Gospels continued to operate afterwards, it appears to me not unreasonable to suppose that in the course of the next forty or fifty years sixteen more were written in different places, to which if we add the canonical four, my supposed forty will be accounted for; and we have not yet reckoned the Gospel of Peter, nor the two Gospels according to the Hebrews, nor the Gospel of the Simonians, nor that according to the Egyptians, nor the traditions of Matthias, all which the Doctor's *honoured Fathers* must have informed him were extant in the second century. I leave you to judge then, Sir, whether I had no *appearance of authority* for what I have advanced on this head.

In page 30, the Doctor quotes a tradition recorded by Origen "that the first Gospel was written by Matthew:" and that part of his testimony he thinks proper to admit. But he does not tell you that it follows in the same sentence, "that it was written in Hebrew;" which part of his testimony Dr. Lardner and he choose to reject.

He next affirms "that this Gospel (of Matthew) is alluded to by Clemens Romanus, the earliest of all the Christian writers after the apostles," in the Epistle which I allow to be genuine. And again, p. 42, that "the Gospel of Matthew as well of those of Mark and Luke are plainly alluded to by Clemens Romanus who wrote A.D. 96." But I am sorry to be forced to assure you, Sir, that no affirmation can be more contrary to the truth; for Clemens

no where, in that Epistle, mentions a written Gospel of any kind, nor in any manner alludes to those of Matthew and Mark. In two passages*, quoting the words of our Saviour, without naming any particular book, he expresses himself more nearly in the words of Luke than of any other of our canonical Gospels; but not so nearly as to satisfy any impartial reader that he quoted from any of them. A circumstance which, at least, proves that our four Gospels were not universally received and read in all Christian churches in his time, as Dr. Priestley asserts they were; because, in that case, he would naturally have mentioned the particular Gospel in which they were recorded; and have quoted the very words, as hath been customary with all theological writers ever since our present canon of scripture hath been established. If however, as Dr. Priestley supposes, the writer of the Epistle attributed to Clemens was weakly credulous enough to believe the history of the Phenix, had his testimony in favour of the evangelical histories been ever so strong and clear, it would not have had any weight with me.

In page 31, the Doctor allows so much of my inference from the preface to the Gospel of Luke and other passages of his histories as to grant that the writer was entirely ignorant of both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark and had seen neither of them. Though, by the way, this is not easily reconcilable with what he says, p. 37, that the verbally similar passages in these three Gospels are “no more a proof that Matthew or Mark copied Luke, than that he copied them;” for how could he copy what he had not seen? But he chooses, again with Dr. Lardner

* c. 13 and 46.

Lardner, to infer from this circumstance that they all three wrote about the same time, unknown to each other, viz. A. D. 63, 64, or 65. Now, Sir, the only grounds upon which such a supposition can be founded is the single testimony of Ireneus, who says that *Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Hebrews in their own language when Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel and founding the Church at Rome.* The first part of this testimony, that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew, though it is confirmed by the united voice of all antiquity these learned critics reject, as we have seen before; but the latter, as it appears likely to help them out of some difficulties in defending the authenticity of the two first Gospels, though it is contradicted by Eusebius and all succeeding writers, they are pleased eagerly to admit. Yet you yourself, Sir, must be sensible that it cannot be true; because Paul founded the Church at Rome, when he was sent Prisoner thither by Festus, as you have read in the concluding chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: and from the circumstances of that whole history we are as certain as we can be of any thing it contains, that Peter, peculiarly the apostle to the circumcision, was not *then* at Rome; and most probably he never was there in his life. The only remaining testimony therefore of the date of the Gospel of Matthew, which rests merely upon the tradition collected by Eusebius, and is followed by all the later Fathers of the church and in the subscriptions to all the copies of that Gospel is, that *Matthew wrote it in the eighth year after our Saviour's ascension.* But this, Sir, was a period when Luke and Matthew lived together at Jerusalem; and therefore, if this testimony were true, Luke must have

have known of and seen and read the writing. That this was not the case, Mills, Lardner, Pearce, and Dr. Priestley himself all agree, and it must be evident to every attentive and candid reader of their several histories. It therefore necessarily follows, that there never has been any credible testimony produced that Matthew wrote a Gospel; and that what has so long passed for his was received into the canon of the church upon mere vague, unfounded tradition without any rational evidence in its favour. Indeed these Doctors themselves must have been fully convinced of the insufficiency and futility of the historic evidence produced on this occasion; or they could never have presumed to reject one part of it and admit another, just as they conceived best suited to their particular hypothesis.

Such, Sir, is the *universal uncontradicted tradition* which, the Doctor tells you, p. 33, proves that “the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and John were eye-witnesses of what they relate;” to which supposition he adds “there is nothing in the narratives inconsistent.” Yet he passes over in profound silence several circumstances that I have pointed out, which to a reader of common understanding seem to demonstrate that the writers of those two Gospels were not Jews; and render it highly probable that they were superstitious converts from Paganism of the first half of the second century.

As to the Gospel of Luke, in which no such circumstances are to be found, the Doctor is pleased to undervalue that, because “according to Luke himself he was only a collector of the evidence of others.” And because I have shewn that Luke and Silas in the hebrew language would be the same
name;

name; and that we are taught in the Acts that Silas, a leading man together with the apostles amongst the disciples at Jerusalem, was the author of those two histories, a circumstance which shews that he must have been a disciple of our Lord himself; and that, therefore, though he modestly assures his readers that he had taken pains to inform himself of all the particulars of his narrative from the very first, by means of those who were followers of Jesus earlier than he was, yet he must himself have been an eye-witness of many things and those of the greatest importance which are recorded even in his Gospel; Dr. Priestley thinks fit to controvert what I have said on that subject, and triumphantly concludes his remarks to you exclaiming, “on such weak arguments is this hypothesis founded!” But this, Sir, is no *hypothesis* of mine; it is the plain obvious language of the book itself. And if Dr. Priestley and other readers of the Acts of the Apostles for so many centuries have not read the Christian Scriptures with *unprejudic'd* attention sufficient to observe it, there is no reason why you and I should give up the use of our understanding also in compliment to any groundless system however early formed. If we do, we must not presume to understand the plain and only sense of *the kingdom of God*, nor the meaning of that prayer which it is our duty daily to use: for neither the writer of the Gospel of Matthew nor any of those who for so many centuries have received it as of apostolic authority can have rightly understood either. Indeed so little hath that petition of the Lord's prayer been intelligibly explained, and so ignorant are the generality of people of its meaning in the end of the eighteenth century, that a ludicrous

dicrous and popular Poet of our own times repeatedly uses the expression *being sent to kingdom come*, to signify *being put to death*. But let us consider the Doctor's arguments against Silas being the author of the Acts of the Apostles.

His first objection is, in p. 34 and 35, "that from Acts xvi. 10, to verse 17, *we* or *us* occurs in almost every verse; but that immediately after, whenever Paul and Silas only are mentioned the style changes to *they* and *them*." But the obvious reason of this is, that the evangelical partnership (if I may be allowed the expression) which was first formed by Paul with Silas was almost immediately afterwards extended to Timothy, so that, till an entire separation of Timothy from that association took place, *we* and *us* could not with propriety be used by the historian to signify less than the whole associated company; and therefore since Timothy, either on account of his youth or of some other circumstance, was not arrested and imprisoned at Philippi, the subsequent narrative proceeds not in the first but the third person, relating what occurred to them severally. In the same person the historian continues to write in the 19th chapter, because after their return to Asia Erastus and several others attended upon Paul during his abode at Ephesus; and, as they are not enumerated, *we* and *us* which could no longer have signified the same triple association that is spoken of in c. xvi. would have had no intelligible determinate meaning. But when in c. xx. he mentions Timothy's joining another party in his way out of Greece into Asia, so that only two of the original partnership remained, he there adopts again the first person, which he could then do with perfect propriety, and speaking only of Paul and Silas says *we* and *us*.

That

That this confined meaning of *we* and *us* in this history is no groundless fancy of my own, St. Paul himself will satisfy you, if, without depending upon Dr. Priestley's quotation, (who like many other polemic divines too often happens to omit such words in the sentence of the book he quotes as would militate against his argument) you turn to 2 Cor. i. 19, where he most clearly explains the meaning of the word *us*, at the very time of which the author of the Acts is writing in c. xvi, to be himself, Silvanus and Timotheus; for he reminds the Corinthians that they three only first preached the Gospel at Corinth. *Christ*, says the Apostle, was *preached among you*, not as Dr. Priestley quotes it by *us, and Silvanus, &c.* which might include in the meaning of the word *us* as many more as the Doctor may choose to associate with him, but *by us, by me* (or as our translation very properly renders it *even by me*) and *Silvanus and Timotheus*, evidently implying that no other preacher of Christianity accompanied them. This is farther confirmed also by the address of both the Epistles to the Thessalonians written during the same evangelical mission into Macedonia and Greece, which runs in the names of Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus only, as it certainly would not have done, had they been joined at Troas, as the Doctor supposes by a fourth preacher of the Gospel named Luke. Neither is it in any degree probable that so accurate and circumstantial a writer as the author of the Acts would have omitted to mention such an accession to their company, if it had really taken place.

The second objection the Doctor urges is, "that it is not natural for a writer to call the same person by two different names, unless he somewhere

signify that they do mean the same person;" whereas "in two Epistles, viz. 2 Cor. i. 19, and 1 Theff. i. 1, Paul mentions Silvanus or Silas, and in three Epistles, viz. Col. iv. 14, 2 Tim. iv. 11, and Phil. 24, he mentions Luke; therefore Silas or Silvanus and Luke were different persons." You will be pleased to observe, Sir, that in order to strengthen his own syllogism, Dr. Priestley thinks fit to drop entirely 2 Theff. i. 1. and is again guilty of most unfairly arguing from two Epistles, viz. Col. and Phil. which I must regard as spurious and not St. Paul's till he or some other writer shall have satisfactorily proved the contrary; whereas the Doctor hath not even attempted to answer any one objection I have urged against them. By means of this unwarrantable *petitio principii* and his omission of the second Epistle to the Theffalonians he strives to make it appear, that Paul has mentioned the name of Luke three times and that of Silas only twice; whilst, in truth, he never names Luke in any authentic Epistle except his second to Timothy, written some years after the date at which the Acts of the Apostles ends, when the dangers and difficulties of the times might have induced Silas and his friends to exchange his usual appellation for another of similar import and equally expressive of his original Hebrew name (a circumstance which would easily account for the tradition of the second century attributing those two histories to Luke not Silas); but in three undoubtedly genuine Epistles he mentions Silvanus, that is Silas, as the only preacher of the Gospel in company with him except Timothy, referring to the very same time when the author of the Acts informs us that they two only accompanied Paul; and yet writes of that
 company

company in the first person. Besides, if Luke and Silas be not the same person, since all the first preachers of the Gospel were Jews and consequently had hebrew names before they adopted others of like import in Greek or Latin to familiarize themselves amongst the Greeks and Romans, the hebrew name of both the persons called Luke and Silas must have been the same or at least of the same import, which it is in the highest degree improbable should have been the case with two different Jews who associated themselves to Paul at the same time. And as the author of the Acts hath so circumstantially related the dissension and separation of Barnabas and Paul, if Silas, whom Paul chose for an associate in his room, had ever left him within the period of that history, he would certainly have related that separation also and the cause of it; which since he has not done, we must conclude that Silas continued with him to the last and accompanied him to Rome, as the writer of the history declares he himself did. But is it credible that a different person called Luke was equally associated with Paul, and continued with him during exactly the same period and in all the same circumstances and situations that Silas did, without being once mentioned either in the history itself or in any of the Epistles of Paul which refer expressly to those who were particularly associated with him, when he first preached the Gospel in Macedonia and Achaia?

As You, Sir, being young are probably free from the shackles of interested prejudice, I persuade myself, when you attentively consider all these circumstances, you will be convinced with me that Silas was the author of the two histories
called

called Luke's; and will learn justly to appreciate the worth of that traditionary testimony of the Fathers of the Church, which Dr. Priestley thinks so all-sufficient and infallible. And, I have no doubt, you will with me also receive great satisfaction in finding that two of the Christian Scriptures containing a respectable, well-written, consistent history of Christianity from the baptism of John in the fifteenth year of Tiberius to the ninth or tenth of the reign of Nero were really, as to the main of their contents, written by a Jewish disciple, whom Paul himself and all the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem judged worthy to be associated with him in his mission to the Gentiles, and who was so early one of the prophets and of the *chief* or leading men amongst the first Christians, that he must have been a disciple of our Lord himself and consequently an eye-witness of the most important transactions recorded in his Gospel, as well as of those related in the Acts.

In my examination of the Dissonance of the Evangelists, I have adduced what appear to me convincing arguments to prove that the writer of the Gospel called Matthew's must have transcribed from Luke and the author of Mark's from both of them. To these Dr. Priestley does not furnish you with direct and particular answers; but endeavours to account for such verbal similarity in all the three, by supposing (p. 37.) "that there might be imperfect but authentic accounts of many of the particulars, which were equally in the hands of them all, and which might be copied, with more or less variation, by them all." And a little lower, "from these scattered writings, as well as from their own recollection and other evidence, might the

the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke be composed." If such, Sir, be the real opinion of Dr. Priestley respecting the only remaining testimony of those witnesses, who are said to have been chosen by God himself, and miraculously delegated to preach the Gospel of the new covenant to the world, it is to me absolutely unaccountable, how he can pretend to the character of a rational being, and profess to be satisfied of the truth of the Christian religion. For if these witnesses themselves were so insufficiently informed of the substance of their own testimony, as to have derived it partly from the *imperfect accounts* of unknown, uncertain writers, partly from evidence of some other kind, but still different from their own recollection; for God's sake, upon what rational foundation does the truth of our religion stand? Or what court of equity in the world would admit the authority of written evidence so circumstanced?

As to what follows about abridgments, why it was introduced I know not; for it no ways concerns me. But (p. 39, 40.) acknowledging that there really are inconsistencies and contradictions in those Gospels, he tells you "nothing can be inferred from them, but that the authors did not write in concert and did not copy from one another" and that, notwithstanding such *variations* in their narratives, "they might all be very honest men." Now, Sir, I do not presume to judge for you; but my mind is *so constituted* that whenever I see or hear two inconsistent, contradictory stories or propositions, I am sure one of them, at least must be false: and I necessarily conclude, that he who tells me the falsehood, if he does it wilfully is not an honest man; if ignorantly and because he was himself deceived,

ceived, that he is ill-informed and credulous: and in either case, I can place no confidence in anything he tells me, so far as it depends upon his testimony alone. Yet the Doctor expresses his surprize that I, who, he supposes, "admit that the authors wrote without any inspiration at all," should advance such an argument. And again, p. 46. he tells you he is surpris'd, that I should argue that the writer of the Gospel ascribed to Mathew could not be an Apostle, because *he did not understand the prophecies of the Jewish scriptures*; for that "Peter misapplied the scriptures in his famous speech on the day of Pentecost, as evidently as the writer of this Gospel." How this language of Dr. Priestley may affect you, Sir, you best know; but nothing in my book can have surpris'd him more than it surpris'es me. I am not ignorant that Dr. Middleton has, I think rashly and without due grounds, advanced the same accusation against Peter; but I did not think it possible for any person, who really believed the covenant of the Gospel to be a revelation from the Deity, to have entertained such an opinion of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

Rather than give up any one scripture, which he has so long and with such ingenuity of argument been accustomed to expound and adapt to his own religious system, Dr. Priestley calls the Apostles indeed *honest men*; but represents them as *weak, ignorant, credulous, misinformed and mistaken* even about the very scriptures upon which the truth of that Gospel they taught is founded. And can you think, Sir, that they * *will approve his conduct*? Surely whenever Matthew, Mark and John shall awake from the sleep of death, they will acknowledge.

* See his Preface, p. 8 and 9.

ledge that I, who deny the scriptures attributed to them to be theirs, because they appear altogether unworthy of them and unlike what must reasonably be expected from the miraculously informed delegates of heaven, have consulted their honour and reputation much more than he, who merely to defend the testimony of uncertain oral tradition collected and recorded only by the credulous, superstitious and fabulous Fathers of the apostate Church, persists in maintaining that they werewritten by them; although to account in any manner for the absurdities, improbabilities and inconsistencies they contain he is forced to hold out their supposed authors in such a light, as must make them and their writings just objects of contempt and ridicule to every impartial, thinking man.

What the Doctor means by *plenary inspiration* I neither know nor care; but when the Deity vouchsafes to communicate his will and propose a covenant to mankind which is intended to accomplish the most important revolutions in the moral and social concerns of all the nations of the earth, the least that can be expected is, that his messengers should be fully and infallibly informed, either by natural or supernatural means, concerning the nature, grounds and purport of their extraordinary commission; that they should be of strict veracity and endowed with such a degree of knowledge and strength of judgment as would not only render their doctrines intelligible to those whom they were to teach, but themselves as incapable of being deceived about the Gospel they were sent to preach, as they must be supposed of wilfully deceiving others. If Jesus himself, his apostles and first disciples were thus qualified for their office, whatever
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they have really taught us, deserves the soberest regard and most considerate attention from us. If they had not these qualifications, they could never be the delegates of that Being who is the eternal source of goodness, wisdom and truth.

Now, Sir, with respect to the Jewish prophecies since our Lord Jesus did not explain them to his disciples during his mortal life, but after his resurrection, when his intellectual faculties must necessarily have been enlarged and rendered adequate not only to that immortal state of spiritual existence to which he was raised, but to the exalted dignity and powerful preeminence of the Messiah, Christ or King of all mankind, with which God invested him immediately after his resurrection, we cannot suppose that he misunderstood the meaning of any of the predictions concerning himself and his Gospel, which we are told he *then* explained to his disciples out of the Pentateuch, the book of Psalms and the Prophets, *opening their understanding* and conversing with them for near forty days successively. And is it credible that these men *chosen by God* to be witnesses of his resurrection, and to expound the very same prophecies to the Jews in proof of the truth and divine authority of the new covenant which they announced should not understand their meaning, even after the miraculous effusion of that holy inspiration, which, in however small a degree Dr. Priestley may suppose it illuminated their minds, we are assured on much more respectable authority*, was to *give them a mouth and wisdom which all their adversaries should not be able to gainsay nor resist*? Is it credible that such men as these could be the authors of fabulous,

* Luke xxi. 15.

lous, erroneous and contradictory narratives, or misapply any prophecy of the Jewish scriptures to the circumstances of the Gospel? Or can we believe that three thousand Jews could be converted by Peter's reasoning deduced from an *evident* misapplication of their own prophecies? If such were the fact, as Dr. Priestley asserts it was, so far as I am capable of judging, either Peter must have been a most ignorant and impudent impostor, and the three thousand converted Jews the most absurdly credulous of mortals; or else the historian must have designedly related a double falsehood respecting this speech of the Apostle: in which case, we could no longer give credit to any of those most important facts, which he alone hath recorded.

In page 45, the Doctor is pleased to tell you, with the usual misrepresentation of a polemic, that I say the practice of writing latin words in greek characters "might be common in the time of Trajan, A. D. 98, and not be known, A. D. 64." And even this misrepresentation is farther exaggerated by his presuming to fix A. D. 64, for the date of the Gospel of Matthew. For you have seen, Sir, that according to the whole weight of that only admissible *evidence of testimony* which Dr. Priestley himself assures you is so universally satisfactory, if Matthew wrote any Gospel, he wrote at latest A. D. 41. But I have never said that such a practice was *common in the time of Trajan*. I have only inferred from the circumstances stated in p. 29 and 30 of my *Dissonance*, that it is not probable such a practice was introduced by any writer sooner than *the latter end of the reign of Trajan*, who died A. D. 117, at the interval of three fourths of a century from the date at which all the Fathers of the Church inform

us Matthew wrote his Gospel; and that therefore the Gospel called Matthew's could not be written earlier than *the beginning of the second century*, and consequently was not written by him nor by any other apostle.

Whilst I was writing this letter, a learned friend who had read my examination of the Dissonance of the Evangelists and Dr. Priestley's remarks addressed to you, sent me some curious extracts from Le Clerc's third Dissertation at the end of his Harmony, containing the sentiments of the famous Dodwell and the concessions which Le Clerc himself was forced to make concerning the great number of undistinguishable "fictitious books falsely attributed to the Apostles and their followers in the very first age," which abounded still more in the second century "upon fairer hopes of imposing upon the world." I recommend the Dissertation itself to your perusal; and you will there see, that a man of Dodwell's uncommon learning, industry and zealous application to the investigation and study of all the existing records respecting the Christian scriptures, was led to fix the earliest time for the general reception of the Gospels to be the latter end of Trajan's or the beginning of Hadrian's reign; the very same æra, which from the obvious circumstances of the language in which they are written I have inferred must be the earliest at which the Gospels of Matthew and Mark (and consequently of John, which is confessedly later) could have made their appearance. Yet instead of refuting so rational and well-founded an argument, by producing a single instance of any writer sacred or profane, who has adopted such a mode of writing before that period, Dr. Priestley affects to represent it as deserving

deserving only your contempt and ridicule, by means of a buffoon quotation from the renowned history of Don Quixote de la Mancha.

In the succeeding paragraph the Doctor pretends to account for the phrase *unto this day* repeatedly used by the writer of the Gospel called Matthew's, by again asserting that it was written thirty years after the events. In reply to which I shall only remind you that, according to the unanimous testimony of all those historic witnesses, on whose *proper and satisfactory evidence* he professes to have built his religious belief, Matthew wrote his Gospel only eight years after the crucifixion.

As to what he says of "the arbitrary manner in which I suppose the writings of Luke himself to have been interpolated;" a supposition which every man that is acquainted with the practices of the second and third centuries knows is far from improbable; I shall merely repeat the purport of what I have already observed in my obnoxious treatise itself, that suspicion alone is not a sufficient cause for adjudging any passage to be interpolated; unless satisfactory reasons are also alleged for entertaining such a suspicion. Whether the arguments I have urged, against any of the passages that I have objected to, be or be not of that satisfactory kind, must be left to the decision of you, Sir, and my other readers.

In his fifth letter, the Doctor proceeds to give particular answers to each objection that I have urged against the authenticity of the Gospel of Matthew. But the far greater part of his answers are of the very sort that I protested against in my Preface, viz. conjectural suppositions or *hypothetical systems unwarranted by the Gospels themselves.*

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That I may not therefore unnecessarily trouble you or myself about such ideal phantoms of the imagination, which would most probably vary their forms according to the varying fancies of different harmonists, whenever the Doctor attempts to obviate any objection by saying that, the case *may* or *might have been* attended with such or such circumstances, though they are not suggested to us by any of the histories themselves, I beg you will understand me to reply that the case was not attended with any such hypothetical circumstances: and then since the Doctor's affirmative and my negative are exactly of equal authority, i. e. none at all, they destroy each other, and the objection remains just as it did at first. For this reason I shall pass over all his answers of that kind with a bare observation that they are hypothetical; as it never was my intention to write against any *Gospel according to Dr. Priestley*.

His first *particular* remark is made upon my observing that the writer of our first Gospel could not be Matthew, nor any other of the Apostles, because instead of Judas, whom Luke in both his histories enumerates as one of them, and which was therefore undoubtedly the hebrew name by which he was usually called and spoken of by all the Apostles and Elders amongst whom Luke himself lived many years at Jerusalem, he puts *Lebheus surnamed*, i. e. whose additional name was *Thaddæus*. Now, Sir, when an author gives us two names of any person in this manner, he certainly intends we should understand that he knew of no other by which he was denominated; so that those commentators, who have endeavoured to shew that *Thaddæus* in the Syrian language signifies the same

as Judas in Hebrew, evidently laboured to remove a palpable contradiction between the two Gospels. But however well this interpretation might account for this change of name, supposing the author to be some Græco-Syrian compiler of an evangelical history in the second century, it cannot make it credible that Matthew, a native Hebrew of Palestine, and who, if he wrote any Gospel at all, wrote it in his native language, should change the Hebrew name of his brother Apostle for one borrowed from the Syrians. Yet all the answer the Doctor gives to this insuperable difficulty is that "it was no uncommon thing for the same persons to have more names than one." Surely, to have made it in the least applicable to this case, it should have been *more names than two*. Can any impartial reader seriously think this an answer to the objection which I have stated? I am confident, not one. But even in selecting his instances of persons called by two different names the Doctor has been very unfortunate. For till he can shew that Nathaniel and Bartholomew, like Silas and Luke, are of similar signification, which I fancy he will hardly attempt to do, he will not be able to render it probable that they mean the same person: and as I depend much more upon the testimony of Luke than on that of all the other Gospels and all the Fathers of the Apostate Church taken together, I am very far from being satisfied that Levi the publican was one of the Apostles, or that Matthew the Apostle ever was a publican.

The only answer the Doctor has chosen to give to the next objection he has noticed being entirely hypothetical, I should have passed it over with this observation, had it not been for a most curious inference

ference with which he concludes the article. Luke c. iii. informs us that Jesus *in the power of the spirit* preached in the synagogues throughout all Galilee; and, that circuitous predication being ended, he tells us, v. 16, that *he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up*: and though, in the verses immediately following, Jesus himself calls reforming the people of Nazareth *healing himself*, and expressly denominates it *his own country*, the Doctor says that by the words of v. 16, “it is clearly intimated, that the place of his residence, if he had any, was elsewhere.” What wonderful sagacity! If, like me, Sir, you happen to be a man only of common sense and plain understanding, you would as soon have expected it to be argued that our Saviour was born at *Capernaum*, because he is always called *Jesus of Nazareth*.

In the article numbered 3, the Doctor has by no means obviated the objection I have stated; but (for which I return him thanks) he has shewn that the author of this Gospel is as inconsistent with himself as he is with Luke. A certain, never-failing mark of one who does not adhere to truth.

His answers to No. 4 and 5, are altogether hypothetical.

In No. 6, the Doctor challenges me to answer what he has thought proper to advance in the *Theological Repository*, respecting the perpetuity of the Mosaic ritual. But if you will read over St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians Sir, you will find the Doctor's unaccountable system so effectually and satisfactorily overthrown, that no other answer to it can be necessary. And I am truly sorry, that in the latter end of the eighteenth century a man should be found of such high literary eminence,
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who has spent a long life in the particular vocation of a teacher of Christianity, who is yet so ignorant of the prophecies relating to the very religion he professes to teach, as to think that when the predicted *New Jerusalem* has descended *from above* to bless all the nations of the earth with perfect freedom, the *Old Jerusalem* shall be restored to the Jews alone, and they again be subject to *bondage*; and that after the Jews themselves together with all other nations shall by their conversion to Christ have attained a rational, manly maturity of religious knowledge and wisdom under the new covenant of the Gospel, they alone shall be sent back to school again, and submit for ever to the *childish discipline of the Law of Moses*.

Articles 7, 8, 9, and 10, contain no answers to the objections they refer to.

In No. 11, the Doctor himself acknowledges the insuperable validity of my objection; but being determined, at any rate, to retain so valuable and respectable a scripture he tells you, it is not "of such magnitude as to affect the genuineness of the Gospel."

Before you form any judgment of that paragraph of the Doctor's fifth letter to you marked 12, I beg you will read over the whole of what I have said respecting the prophecy contained in the 24th chapter of Matthew beginning at p. 209 of my treatise. You will there see, Sir, that I have pointed out two manifest falsehoods in this pretended prediction of the great founder of our religion; one at v. 14, which every man living knows to be false; another at v. 9, which directly contradicts both the Gospel of Luke and the whole tenor of the history of Christianity. Of these weigh-
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ty objections Dr. Priestley takes not the slightest notice, thinking perhaps that even absolute falsehood is too trifling to affect the genuineness of the Gospel; and that a want of veracity, as well as credulity, misinformation and a misapplication of the Jewish scriptures, is compatible with the character of an Apostle of Jesus Christ. To the difficulties suggested also in the two concluding questions of the passage he has quoted from my book he gives no answer of any kind. He only amuses himself with a kind of quibbling argument founded upon a supposition, that the *abomination of desolation standing in the holy place* and the *investing of Jerusalem by the Roman armies* signify the same thing. But if the phrase *holy place* signifies the *holy land*, that is, the country of Palestine, since the Roman armies were actually within that land from the very commencement of the Jewish wars, the Christians, according to this interpretation, were warned to flee from the country of the Jews upon the first insurrection of their countrymen against the Romans; yet, according to Luke, they were not to expect that final ruin of the nation, which was the great object of the prophecy, till a considerable period after those wars began, nor until they should see Jerusalem itself formally besieged. As to the Doctor's last remark upon the subject, it might lead one to think him wholly unacquainted with the history of that famous siege; for Josephus informs us that, even during the siege, the inhabitants were invited and exhorted to escape from the city; and that great numbers did so and were permitted by Titus to go freely whithersoever they pleased.

In reviewing the 26th chapter of Matthew (p.
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181, &c.) I have remarked *many different and contradictory circumstances absolutely irreconcilable to St. Luke's history of the same things*, all which the Doctor has chosen to pass over in profound silence, except my observation respecting the words said to have been used by our Saviour at the institution of his supper. But in article 13, he has given you a misrepresentation of the words of Matthew's Gospel, which are not what the Doctor has stated, but *this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins*. This he tells you is an *obscure expression*. Do you find it so Sir? To me it appears as clear and intelligible as any sentence I ever read. And if the doctrine of atonement and expiation of sins by his blood so largely expatiated upon in the Epistle to the Hebrews is not *principally* deduced from this very passage, Dr. Priestley should at least have shewn you, on what other parts of the evangelical histories it is founded. That this Gospel was forged on purpose to teach that doctrine, is what I never asserted nor thought; though the Doctor is pleased to affirm the contrary.

In article 14, Dr. Priestley tells you there is no contradiction between Matthew and Luke respecting the order given to our Lord's disciples to go into Galilee in order to see him, whither, according to a prior promise, he tells the women he was going before them on the very morning of his resurrection, and whither they all accordingly went and saw him; but that Luke "only omits the circumstance noticed by Matthew." If, however, you can believe this, your faith in Dr. Priestley must be as firm as his is in the Gospel of Matthew. For according to the pretended Matthew our Lord

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did not appear to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection and the following evening; but they saw him for the first time on the appointed mountain in Galilee, as is evident from the doubts which the writer assures us some of them expressed: whereas Luke asserts, that after being seen by Peter and the two disciples at Emmaus, he appeared to them all together at Jerusalem the first evening after his resurrection; and removed all their doubts by offering them his *flesh and bones to handle* and examine, and by eating before them all. And let the writers called Matthew and John teach what they please, since according to the prophecies of the old covenant as well as to the Gospel of Luke, the preaching the *glad tidings* of the new covenant was to *begin at Jerusalem*, it is as inconsistent with reason and common sense, as it is with both the histories of Luke, to suppose that our Saviour unnecessarily enjoined upon them, at any time of the forty days, a journey on foot of fourscore miles and back again, for no rational purpose whatsoever.

In No. 15, the Doctor declares himself *offended* with an *irony*, which was never intended by me. I have simply stated the express words of this Gospel on the occasion, and avowed my disbelief of them; because they are descriptive of a perturbation of mind highly improbable and unbecoming our Lord Jesus, as well as inconsistent with the account Luke gives us of the very same transaction. If any thing ironical, therefore, appears, the impropriety must be in the words of the writer himself, not in mine. But be it where it may, the Doctor will not get rid of it by turning the command into an interrogation; for the greek word, which he unwarrantably

unwarrantably translates *still*, signifies *for the rest of your time* or *for the future*; and to ask people whether *they sleep for the future?* is just as rational as to ask them *how they do tomorrow?*

In the next article, the Doctor is equally unsuccessful in attempting to solve the difficulty by a *compromise*, as he was in the former by an interrogation point. For, according to the accounts of both Gospels, Jesus was apprehended not long after his retiring from supper, before the usual time of going to rest; and the Gospel of Matthew flatly contradicts that of Luke, by asserting that those who apprehended him led him away immediately to the house of Caiaphas, where a council of the Chief Priests and Elders was ready assembled. If we credit this writer, therefore, that *meeting* was not *held late in the night and near morning*.

At No. 17, you are told that I cavil at the phrase *απ' αρτι*, which is evidently borrowed from Luke's *απο τ' ουν*, from or after the present time; but you must be sensible that such an expression cannot refer to the miraculous appearance of our Lord *at the last day* after an interval of at least three thousand years. In Luke's narrative our Saviour's answer plainly intimates, that he was not *then* actually constituted *the Christ*, but that, immediately after they had put him to death, the time of their doing which was *then* arrived, he should be exalted to that glorious character predicted by their prophets, and invested with that power, which he accordingly displayed in the supernatural gifts of the holy inspiration; in his revelations to John and Paul; in the severe judgments inflicted on Jerusalem and the Jewish nation in general; and which he has displayed and will continue to display in those

those equally severe judgments that have been and still remain to be inflicted upon apostate Christendom, previous to the general establishment of his new covenant in the world. What the author of Matthew's Gospel meant by the speech he has put into our Lord's mouth on the same occasion I do not understand; but it is no uncommon thing with him, like all other falsifiers, to be inconsistent with himself as well as with more respectable writers.

The answer to my objection stated by the Doctor, No. 18, besides that it takes no notice of some very material circumstances which I have pointed out, is too childish and absurd to merit a serious reply.

In No. 19, the doctor has given you a long quotation, in which I have remarked many circumstances of this Gospel's narrative of the burial and resurrection of our Saviour that cannot be reconciled to the history of Luke, which the Doctor passes by unnoticed; and he seems to think it a sufficient answer to the whole, to tell you "that the Jewish evening began at our three in the afternoon, for that was the time of the evening sacrifice." For the very same *satisfactory* kind of reason, the Jewish morning must have begun at our nine in the morning, for that was the time of the morning sacrifice. By this curious way of reckoning, you see, Sir, that the Jewish day could contain only six hours. Yet all other commentators, for want of Dr. Priestley's superior genius and sagacity, seem to have supposed, as I did, that the sacrifices were so denominated only to distinguish that which was offered nearest to the beginning from the other which was offered nearest to the end of the day; and to have understood the Jewish day
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to consist of twelve hours; that the hour of the morning sacrifice was the third, and of the evening sacrifice the ninth hour of the day; and that their day, as opposed to night, began at sun-rise and ended at sun-set.

The Doctor takes occasion also in this place to assure you, that *he has proved*, by which he must mean *he has confidently asserted*, for no other proof has he produced, that I am mistaken in thinking the Jews did not make the sabbath a day of convivial feasting. And he formerly referred me to any modern Jew, to satisfy myself that they do so at this day. Now I want nothing but the books of the old Testament to satisfy me that, if they do so, they must violate the Law given them by Moses; but I made the inquiry into their present custom, from a rational, moral Jew, who seems seriously attached to his religion from principle, by stating the case to him in Dr. Priestley's own words. His answer was that, "the Gentleman was greatly mistaken; for that they never made a feast for guests on a sabbath day except when one of their family was circumcised on that day:" which must sometimes happen, and which exception itself is made in obedience to the Law of Moses. As to the charge brought against the Jewish rulers in this Gospel of violating the sabbath, it does not consist in their *walking to a small distance or speaking*, but in carrying the materials necessary for sealing the door of the sepulchre and in conversing about and transacting business relative to the watch.

In the beginning of this letter the Doctor told you, he would *fairly recite all my objections*: but if you will take the trouble of reading my book, you will find many very important objections urged by
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me which he has not so much as mentioned: though one in particular, concerning the story of Judas the traitor is so very conspicuous comprehending three whole pages, that I can only account for his silence by supposing he knew not what to say.

In his sixth letter, the Doctor proposes to obviate the objections of another kind which I have urged against the apostolic authenticity of his *favourite* Gospel of Matthew; and the first article he has selected is what I have observed of the author's imperfect knowledge of the Geography of Palestine, which he prefaces with a remark, that if any *such inaccuracies had existed in it*, they "must have been discovered by Origen, Eusebius, Jerom, &c." But can it be imagined, that the Fathers of the apostate church would be ready to find flaws in those scriptures upon which their church was founded; and in the support of which their own interest was most intimately concerned? Let it be argued in favour of the two first chapters, which the Doctor himself rejects; (though according to his infallible evidence of testimony, their authenticity appears to me to be as well established as that of all the remaining chapters) and in favour of the grounds for the Doctrine of the Trinity deduced from the form in which baptism is commanded to be administered in the last chapter, that if there had existed any reasonable objection to the first, or any error in the latter, "it must have been discovered by Origen, Eusebius, Jerom and other learned Christians of early times." Do you think, Sir, that such an argument would satisfy the Doctor of the truth of either? As to his own answer, which follows the quotation from my book, I know not how you may find it, but to me it is unintelligible. I have observed

observed that this gospel-writer calls Joseph's going to live at *Nazareth*, "not going into Galilee, but into the parts or coasts of Galilee;" to which the Doctor answers that "it is evident, the phrase *in the parts or coasts of Galilee*, means the *extreme parts* of the country so called; and in this situation *Capernaum* was!" A few lines farther he tells you, that "Palestine comprized the country on both sides the river, and the same part that was on the west side with respect to some of the inhabitants, would to others be on the east and vice versa." Now, Sir, the river itself did certainly lye eastward to some parts of Palestine and westward to others. But that to any of them *the west side of the river could be the east and vice versa*, is a discovery perfectly new and peculiar to the penetrating genius of Dr. Priestley. As to Bp. Pearce, he was much too good a greek scholar to contend that the preposition translated *beyond* really signifies *contiguous to* and even *on this side*. He only says, that in order to make the Gospels of Matthew and John consistent with probability and geographical truth, the preposition must be so understood in three or four passages of those writings, and not according to its usual acceptation. An observation of that eminent critic which only confirms me the more in the idea I have formed of those Gospels.

Article 2, contains the Doctor's remarks upon the objection I have stated as arising from the authors of this and Mark's Gospel using the word Decapolis as the name of some particular province of Palestine, which it appears from Josephus and Pliny never existed; and which was never used by any other writers to signify any thing else than a deced of detached Jewish cities annexed by the Romans

Romans to the government of Syria. But he only tells you that the objection is a mere unfounded conjecture of my own; and that "Josephus gives this district this appropriate name." In proof of the latter he quotes a passage from his life, where, according to the Doctor's translation, the word Decapolis is twice used. I assure you however, Sir, that in both those instances the original has *the ten cities*; and that Josephus, except in that one case which I have quoted, where he says Scythopolis was the largest city of the decad, never uses the term Decapolis, but calls them *the ten cities of Syria*. In short, according to tradition and the testimony of the Fathers, if Matthew wrote any Gospel at all, he wrote it in hebrew about the second year of Claudius and not A. D. 64, as the Doctor would have you believe. When Augustus divided the Jewish kingdom amongst the sons of Herod the great, Josephus informs us he put three of those cities only under the authority and jurisdiction of Syria. And, as no alteration was made in the distribution of Palestine after the death of Augustus before the twelfth year of Claudius, it is evident that the other seven cities of Palestine which completed the decad must have been added to the Proconsulate of Syria, either gradually or all together, after that time. Consequently during our Saviour's ministry, and even eight or nine years after, when Matthew is said to have written, the very term Decapolis, take it in what sense you please, could not have had existence.

In reply to article 3. I have only to observe that when Judea is used generally to signify the whole of Palestine, it includes Galilee as well as the Jewish territory beyond the Jordan; and that when it
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is used in contradistinction to Galilee or any other particular province, it can signify nothing more than the provincial district of Judea.

At No. 4, the Doctor quotes one of my arguments against the story of the transfiguration; and tells you he “can have no opinion of any man’s judgment who can decide on such a subject,” upon so trifling an objection. Yet trifling as it is, you find he had no way of obviating it, except by declaring that though “the author of the last chapter of Deuteronomy and all the Jews thought Moses died, as Aaron did before him,” he might be translated “as Elijah was; and this he is inclined to believe was the case.” But what opinion, Sir, will you have of that man’s judgment, who in the last age of a life spent in the particular occupation of explaining the holy scriptures to others, avows his own disbelief of the death and burial of Moses? When one of those scriptures* informs us, that when God commanded him to view the promised land from mount Abarim, he added, *when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered to thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered.* When another§ assures us that, on a different occasion, God said to him, *Behold the days approach that thou must die. Behold thou shalt sleep with thy fathers.* And again, † *Die in the mount whither thou goest up and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people.* After so convincing a proof how far the judgment of the most celebrated writer may be warped by prejudice, I hope, Sir, you, as I have long done, will adopt for the rule of your conduct the poet’s maxim which I have pre-

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* Numb. xxvii. 13.

§ Deut. xxxi. 14, and 16.

† Deut. xxxiii. 52.

fixed to this letter, and instead of trusting implicitly to the doctrines of the greatest men examine every question thoroughly on both sides, and judge for yourself.

But this objection, which the Doctor calls *so trifling* and finds so unanswerable, is still farther strengthened by another difficulty which I have suggested in the very same note. For in this story of the transfiguration, as well as in that of the baptism of Jesus, he is miraculously called the *Son of God* before his death; though till after that event he always disclaimed that title, calling himself only *Son of Man*, as he really was. It was by his birth from the grave to his present spiritual immortal life that he became the *Son of God*. The day of his resurrection was the day alluded to in the prophecy, “thou art my son, *this day* have I begotten thee;” and that was the day when God “made him his *first-born* and exalted him far above the kings of the earth.” It was not therefore, as Dr. Priestley intimates, through a *slight inadvertence of Paul*, but by God himself that he is declared to be *the first-born from the dead*.

To article 5, the Doctor himself acknowledges he knows not what to answer.

In article 6, “he sees nothing deserving a particular answer.” He therefore only assures you, that the miracles which I treat as incredible, he “looks upon with reverence, and without the least disposition to incredulity.” If you are wise, Sir, you will be influenced by neither of us; but think and reason for yourself and believe only what your own judgment finds worthy of credit.

In the answers given to the objections he has marked 7 and 8, the Doctor shews that he neither understands

understands the meaning of Luke nor me; and that he has no fixed, determinate idea in his own mind of the true sense of the phrase *kingdom of God*: otherwise, he could never have talked of “the kingdom of God properly commencing with the preaching of Jesus;” nor that, at the destruction of Jerusalem, “the kingdom of God was (only) nigh at hand;” nor of “the great prevalence of unbelief and consequently of vice and wickedness, before our Saviour’s second coming,” &c.

In all the authentic scriptures the phrase *kingdom of God* uniformly signifies the establishment of the new covenant of the Gospel in the hearts of men. That kingdom could not commence till Jesus, the mediator of the new Covenant, was constituted the Messiah, Christ or King of it, which was not till after his resurrection; nor will it be perfected and correspond to the magnificent ideas given of it in all the prophecies, till what is emphatically called *our Lord’s coming* shall take place. In the mean time, as soon as ever the new Covenant of that kingdom was published to the world by his apostles and first disciples, he displayed many visible, supernatural instances of the regal power with which God had invested him, in communicating to them the miraculous gifts of the holy inspiration and sundry revelations of the divine will respecting the future state of human affairs. And though after the abolition of the old Mosaic Covenant, by the total dispersion of the Jewish nation, the kingdom of the new Covenant was in some degree established in the hearts of the few rational, faithful subjects of Jesus Christ who accepted and adhered to it, yet that glorious, universal state of it, for which we are taught to pray, remains

mains still to be accomplished. In the interim, therefore, it is compared to a little leaven hidden in a large bulk of meal, where the leaven represents the state of *the kingdom of God* in the world from that time to the present, and the unleavened mass the rebellious or unreformed state of the rest of mankind under the influence of Judaism, Paganism, the Antichristian apostasy or philosophic unbelief. Now, Sir, try if it be possible for you to read over the passages and parables of the Gospel attributed to Matthew, which I have objected to on this account, and to persuade yourself that the writer understood what our Saviour and all the prophets meant by *the kingdom of God*, which he and he alone calls the *kingdom of heaven*.

To article 9, the answer is merely hypothetical and unwarranted by the history itself.

In answer to article 10, Dr. Priestley assures you that "Matthew does not profess to relate any particulars of the paschal supper, but only the institution of the Lord's supper with which it concluded." But what can he mean by an assertion so palpably untrue? If the spirit of polemic zeal can mislead so well intentioned a man, as I have no doubt Dr. Priestley is, into such gross misrepresentations of facts, as he has been guilty of in these letters to you, Sir, God preserve both you and me from being ever infected with it! Only turn to Matthew c. xxvi. and you will see that from v. 17, to the end of v. 25, it contains a narrative of the preparation of the paschal supper; of his eating it with his disciples; and of a conversation that passed, whilst they were eating it, of and with the traitor. In the three next verses is related the institution of the Lord's supper; and then follows
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the declaration, that he would no more drink of the wine himself; which Luke says was made before they began the paschal supper, and that he did not either then or at the institution of that commemorative rite partake of the wine himself, though the Doctor affirms that Luke tells us he did.

The observation on my remark in article 11, is founded merely in hypothesis.

Respecting No. 12, I must remind you that, though I have stated "the appointed meeting of Jesus with his disciples in Galilee" (which Dr. Priestley thinks so natural) to be a direct contradiction to the truth as it is related to us by Luke and confirmed by the account which Paul tells us he received of it from our Lord himself, the Doctor has not thought proper to take the least notice of that contradiction; only to my remark upon the pretended, improbable circumstance of their *worshipping him* he is pleased to reply, that I know the word translated *worship* signifies only *making him a bow*, and not paying him divine honour. Now, Sir, if you will consult your greek Testament, Apoc. xxii. 8, you will find the very same word used to denote that more *particular respect*, which the Apostle *felt himself disposed to shew* the angel of the vision, but which that celestial minister earnestly prohibited as criminal when offered to any being but God. However, be the meaning of the greek word what it may, he retorts upon me, that the same expression is used also by Luke to describe the behaviour of the apostles to Jesus after his ascension, in the conclusion of his Gospel. A mere reader of the vulgar translation might naturally make such a remark. But is it
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candid in Dr. Priestley, (who p. 58. prefers the reading of one solitary copy to that of all the other existing copies taken together, in a passage where the common sense of the transcriber might easily induce him, though unwarrantably, to deviate from the words before him) in this place to take no notice that the words *they worshipped him* are not to be found in six different copies of Luke's Gospel? And as no writer ever yet introduced circumstances of importance into a concise, abbreviated narration of an event, and omitted them in a more diffuse account of the same story given afterwards; since this circumstance is not mentioned in the enlarged, particular history of the ascension given us in *the Acts*; every unprejudiced reader will be satisfied that those six copies give us the genuine reading of that verse; and that the other copies have been interpolated, in accomodation to the Gospel of Matthew or to the prepossession of the transcribers. As to the doubts mentioned "by the Evangelist" called Matthew, the Doctor acknowledges they are "by no means probable." But what he means by adding that Matthew "gives no intimation of any remaining doubts," I cannot comprehend; because his express words are that, at the time when he tells us *they worshipped him, some doubted*, and to that time only my objection refers.

In the first article of his seventh letter, the Doctor is pleased to animadvert upon the remarks I have made on the similitude said, in this Gospel alone, to subsist between the situation of Jonah in the whale's belly, and that of our Saviour in the grave. All that he says however upon the subject is that, "the proper evidence of the divine mission of Jesus was his resurrection." But that evidence was

was not given to the Jewish people at large, as the Pharisees required, but only to those pre-elected witnesses his first disciples. He adds that "Jonah and Jesus continued *in a state nearly alike*; though the first was alive and the other dead;" (what a striking likeness!) and for the same space of time; for that in "the Jewish phraseology *three days and three nights* only means *the third day*." I have too often smiled over the impotent efforts of commentators upon this subject not to know that this last assertion is absolutely without foundation; not a single instance of such phraseology being to be produced out of the Jewish scriptures. Indeed, if in any language the phrase *a night and a day* does not signify the whole of the twenty four hours it must be absolutely unintelligible. For example, as Jesus did not expire till the ninth hour of the day, if you allow the time necessary after his death, for the petition of Joseph to Pilate; for his taking down the corpse from the cross, preparing the cloth to wrap it in and depositing it in the sepulchre; he could not have been in the grave more than an hour or perhaps half an hour of what Dr. Priestley calls *one night and one day*. How then are we to understand the apostle Paul when he says * *a night and a day I have been in the deep*? Was he only half an hour or an hour in that perilous situation?

With respect to article 2. as the whole force of the Doctor's answer to my objection consists in the question with which he concludes it; for a reply, I have only to desire you to read over his own quotation from my book; where you will see that question already fully answered.

What he has thought proper to say respecting the

* 2 Cor. xi. 25.

the two parables mentioned in article 3. merits not the least notice.

In reply to the Doctor's animadversions on the fourth article, I wish you to ask him, since he has undertaken to explain how *evil thoughts* "may be said to come out of a man's mouth," why he did not explain to you also, how *murder* and *theft* can be said to proceed out of *the mouth* of the solitary, silent murderer or thief?

Taking notice of the parable marked by Dr. Priestley, No. 5, I have remarked the injustice of punishing an offender after granting him "absolute *unconditional* forgiveness;" to which the Doctor replies, "it is agreeable, however, to the maxims of the divine government, all the promises, as well as threatenings of God, being in fact *conditional*. Is not this a curious answer?"

In article 6. the Doctor quotes my objections to our Lord's being made to say *there be eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*, and tells you those words "evidently mean, their choosing to lead a single life." If this were true, Sir, is it credible that instances of resolutions or vows of celibacy, *for the kingdom of heaven's sake*, could have taken place not only before the commencement of that kingdom, but even when it had hardly been proclaimed in public and was only announced to the Jews as approaching or *near at hand*? But translate the whole sentence according to Dr. Priestley's interpretation of this clause, and observe what nonsense it will make. "There are some leaders of a single life who were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some leaders of a single life who were made to lead a single life by men; and there be leaders of a single
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gle life who have made themselves lead a single life for the kingdom of heaven's sake." Can Dr. Priestley be seriously in earnest in all this? Yet as if he supposed you could be satisfied with such childish absurdity, he tells you my objection *requires no other animadversion*. But he adds that, Tatian the disciple of Justin Martyr was the founder of the sect of the Encratites; and that if this gospel had been written after his time, it could never have been received as the production of Matthew. Now when a man lays so very great and important a stress upon the testimony of the early ecclesiastical writers as Dr. Priestley does, he ought at least to be very well versed in them, and perfectly to understand what that testimony is. But whether Eusebius is as incomprehensible to the Doctor as Tertullian seems to be, or whether he reads with the same inconsiderate precipitancy with which he sometimes appears to write, and so does not allow himself time to attend to the author's meaning, I know not. I only know that, in the very passage from which he learned that Tatian was at all connected with the Encratites,* Eusebius says, that sect proceeded from Saturninus and Marcion, who both preceded Justin; and consequently it existed, as Sir Isaac Newton long ago observed, in the beginning of the second century.

To what I have remarked upon the parable alluded to in article 7. the Doctor has given nothing like an answer; and therefore, if the matter were of greater importance than it is, no reply is necessary on my part.

In the eighth and last article of his defence of this Gospel, Dr. Priestley tells you that it must

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* Hist. Eccl. l. iv. c. 29.

be owing to my ignorance or inattention, that I understand the word *αιωνιος*, in the same sense in which it has always been translated hitherto, as signifying literally *everlasting* or *eternal*; for that it signifies merely *an indefinite long period*. Even this new translation however would not remove the difficulty I have stated. But since the very same word is used to express the duration of the future life of the righteous and the duration of the punishment of the wicked, and in the very same sentence, either it must signify strictly *everlasting* in both cases; or else the future existence promised to the righteous must be understood to mean only existence for *an indefinite long period*: and the longest period compared with eternity is the mere existence of a moment. Upon what authority then does Dr. Priestley, by such modes of interpreting the scriptures, presume to deprive the faithful disciple of Jesus Christ of his brightest and most encouraging prospect, reduce his hopes of future happiness from eternity to time and rob him of the most precious promises of the Gospel?

In his Appendix, p. 168, to invalidate the objection arising from this writer's representing the women as present at the sepulchre of Jesus, at the same time with the soldiers, the Doctor tells you that "there are several instances in which the pronoun *υμεις*, *ye* is used without any particular emphasis, or contrast; as when our Saviour says, Matt. v. 48, *Be ye perfect even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect*. Matt. xiii. 18, *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower*." Yet, in the first instance, the disciples, in the words immediately preceding, are informed how other men and especially publicans behave, and taught that their own benevolence
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must be of a more exalted and perfect kind. And, in the second, replying to the question asked by his disciples, why he spoke to the multitudes in parables? Jesus says, "because it is given unto *you* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to *them* it is not given," &c. "Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower." So that when the Doctor with an air of triumph asks, "where is the contrast here?" If you were much younger than, I suppose, he takes you to be, you would readily answer him, in the former case, between the disciples and the publicans; and, in the latter, between them and the generality of the people to whom the parables were not explained.

The Doctor's eighth letter to you is on my objections to the Gospel of Mark. And he begins and ends it with representing me as having preferred the Gospel of Luke merely by accident or caprice; and tells you that I should "have found as much to object to in this Gospel as in the former if I had bestowed equal pains on it," &c. If you have read my book with any attention, you must know, Sir, that instead of forming my judgment upon no grounds, as the Doctor thinks fit to assert, I have stated my reasons for that judgment very fully and explicitly. Whether those reasons may be as convincing to any of my readers as they are to myself, is not for me to determine; but however weak and trifling they may appear to Dr. Priestley, in common decency as well as justice, he should have contented himself with exposing their weakness and futility; and not have repeatedly misrepresented me as having acted in a matter of such high importance without any reason at all.

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With respect to the paucity of my observations on the Gospel called Mark's, according to the tables of Ammianus, there are but twenty passages of any kind in the whole Gospel which are peculiar to this writer. The rest, excepting what I have taken notice of in the conclusion as borrowed from the Gospel of John, are all found either in that of Matthew or of Luke. The latter I could not object to consistently with my own principles; the former had been already animadverted upon in my objections to the Gospel of Matthew; and of the remaining twenty passages I have made remarks upon seven, which were all that appeared to me worthy of being noticed on such an occasion.

The only answer which the Doctor has vouchsafed to give to my remark, No. 1, is a mere confident assertion, which every person conversant in the ecclesiastical writings of the second and third centuries knows to be directly contrary to the matter of fact. Of this you yourself may be easily satisfied by the perusal of those testimonies to which I have referred you in the passage quoted by Dr. Priestley.

In article 2, the Doctor tells you no answer is necessary to the observations he has quoted; therefore I can have nothing to reply. I only beg leave to remark to you that, I have never called this Gospel an *abridgment*, nor the author an *abridger* of the others, though the Doctor here asserts and elsewhere repeatedly insinuates that I have done so.

In article 3, Dr. Priestley chooses to insinuate also that I have called the author a mere *copier* of Matthew and Luke, though I never thought of such a thing, except in those passages where they
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do not clash with each other. As to the rest of his remark, if you will turn to the Evangelist himself, you will find that his words will not warrant such an evasive answer as the Doctor has thought proper to give.

To my objections quoted in article 4, the Doctor's only direct answer is altogether unwarrantably hypothetical; but his illustration from the old testament must not pass unnoticed.

Elijah and Elisha are by no means proper objects of comparison with the prophet Jesus; but Moses certainly is so. And I beg your attention to the two instances of *his* conduct upon similar occasions produced by Dr. Priestley. The latter, which in order of time ought to have been mentioned first, was no miracle, but a restoration of the waters of Mara to salubrity and an agreeable taste by means of the naturally medical property of a particular wood, as the author of Ecclesiasticus has very properly observed. The other, *ziv.* the striking the rock, which tended to make the people believe that his stroke alone gave vent to the imprisoned waters and made them flow, is recorded as being immediately condemned by the Deity himself; and in punishment for his not clearly manifesting the miraculous interposition of the Almighty, by merely speaking to the rock as he was commanded, he was doomed like all the other rebellious Israelites to die in the wilderness and not to enter into the promised land. And had Jesus of Nazareth been guilty of the practices ascribed to him in this Gospel, he would have been equally criminal in the sight of God.

To the first of the objections quoted in the fifth and last article of this letter the Doctor answers, that
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the words are not to be taken in their literal sense, which he allows is impossible; but only to mean that the sufferer "would have more than an equivalent satisfaction of another kind." But since the centuple compensation is expressly limited to the present life, this seems to me equally impossible with the literal sense in a great variety of cases. And even supposing the consolation of a good conscience to be more than an equivalent for any losses that can be caused by persecution, (which, setting futurity out of the question, I believe nobody will allow,) because Dr. Priestley has, without doubt, received this *more than equivalent satisfaction* for the loss of his library and laboratory, would any writer be warranted in asserting that he had *now, in this time*, received an hundred such libraries and an hundred equally valuable laboratories?

The other objection the Doctor tells you "needs no answer;" and accordingly he has given none to it.

The concluding sentence of this eighth letter is really curious; and seems to imply that Dr. Priestley has conceived so thoroughly contemptible an opinion of the apostles and first preachers of christianity as to think it highly improbable that any of them should have been capable of shewing by the style and manner of their writing that they were endued with any degree of genius and mental abilities; or that they had common sense sufficient to understand propriety of language. Under such great obligations to their zealous, *decent* advocate, on this occasion, are Matthew, Mark and John!

The Doctor's ninth letter contains his animadversions on my objections to the Gospel of John. And in article 1. replying to my remark on the
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great difference between the style of this Gospel and the Revelation, he tells you that there is as great difference of style between some of Paul's Epistles. If he means those Epistles of Paul which I allow to be genuine, nothing can be less true; and I defy him to prove it. If he means only to compare the style of them to that of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as I suspect, or of any other of the Epistles which I reject as spurious, though the argument is urged by him with all the unfairness of a professional polemic, instead of answering his end in this case, it tends only to confirm my arguments against those Epistles.

As to the supposition that the apostles, even after the gift of tongues, did not understand Greek enough to compose their own writings without the assistance of *different persons at different times*, it is too absurd to merit any notice. It is made too of Paul for one, who we know spoke the greek language with the utmost fluency: and who preached the Gospel to the Athenians and to every principal city of Greece in their native language. However, for fear this supposition should not prove satisfactory even to a *young man*, he subjoins an insinuation, that the Apocalypse was not written by John the apostle, but by *the other John*. Pray Sir, ask him who *the other John* was? The scriptures mention only two disciples of that name; one the apostle, emphatically *the servant* of Jesus Christ, who, according to his own avowal and the whole weight of the Doctor's all-sufficient *testimony of evidence*, was the author of the Apocalypse; the other surnamed Mark, by which latter appellation he was usually called to distinguish him from the apostle, and who there is not the slightest pretence to imagine

gine was made the organ of those important prophecies. The grand revelations of the Gospel, after our Lord's ascension, were made first to John in the visions of the Apocalypse, and secondly to Paul, as he has informed us in his Epistles. And, since the latter was the apostle to the Gentiles, nothing can be more improbable, than that our Saviour should have passed by all his other chosen apostles and manifested his predilection of some other John that nobody ever heard off, by sending angels to shew him the prophetic visions of that book, which is emphatically denominated the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

In article 2. Dr. Priestley tells you that the term Logos, used by the author of this Gospel and the Epistles called John's and by no other didactic writer of the new testament, was most probably not borrowed from Plato, but is used only in the same sense as *the word of God* is in the old testament, by which we are told *all things were made*. But those expressions of Moses and David are evidently mere figures of speech, denoting that every part of the creation rose into existence *at the command*, or more properly *at the will* of the Deity; for it is not to be imagined that God actually speaks as men do, when he wills any thing to be done. When the prophet describes the almighty as bringing a sword over any particular country and saying *sword go through that land*, is any man absurd enough to think that God really speaks so to a sword? Yet it were equally unreasonable to understand that the Deity made use of any words at all, when Moses describes the exertion of his infinite power by the phrase *and God said*, or when David alluding to that Mosaic phrase tells us the world was created by the *command*

mand or *word of God* and *by the breath of his mouth*. Now, instead of these figurative phrases, put the plain literal meaning, viz. the will of God, and try whether you can make any tolerable sense of this Gospel, if Logos is so understood. "In the beginning was *the will of God*, and *the will of God* was with God; and *the will of God* was God." And again, "and *the will of God* was made flesh and dwelt amongst us and we beheld *its* glory, the glory as of the *only begotten* of the father, full of grace and truth." As long as men, who think it their duty, which it certainly is, to use their reason in judging of religious questions, shall from long habit and the prejudice of education remain under the delusion of believing all the present canonical scriptures to be genuine works of the apostles and first disciples of our Saviour, so long they will misapply their time and abilities in imagining hypotheses which may, in some ideal manner, reconcile contradictions absolutely irreconcilable; and in endeavouring to give some semblance of a rational meaning to those absurdly fabulous, superstitious passages on which have been founded, first the pagan doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus and his miraculous birth, and secondly the blasphemous and worse than pagan doctrine of his deification in the monstrous system of the Trinity. But though their skilful display of great learning and ingenuity in their endeavours on these occasions may perhaps satisfy themselves and their own religious party, their arguments are never convincing to other people; for one insuperable objection to the success of their well intended labours always remains.

If these books are the works of men chosen, delegated and miraculously impowered by the heaven-

ly source of truth, light and wisdom to teach all men, even the most unlearned and ignorant, the true object of their religious worship, the duties which that Deity requires them to practice and the prospect of a future recompense promised to their obedience; the true meaning of the several passages they contain ought to be obscure and *hard to be understood* to no person endowed with common sense not even to a child. This was the case with the religion revealed by Moses to the people of Israel. It is impossible for any Jew to read the Pentateuch without perfectly understanding the proper and only object of his adoration; the duties enjoined upon him; and the temporal rewards and punishments annexed to the obedience and disobedience both of individuals and of their nation. And since the religion of the Gospel is declared to be far more pure and perfect, of far more extensive influence, and designed by heaven to illuminate the understandings and reform the morals of all the nations of the earth, surely it ought to be, if not more perspicuous, at least as universally intelligible, in all those essential points, as the religion of the Mosaic Law. And therefore, in every authentic scripture of the new covenant, not that to which the labour-ed glosses of learned ingenuity may wrest it, but that which the words themselves would naturally suggest to the illiterate reader, must be the true sense of every passage; a sense which no candid, impartial reasoner can suppose to be unintelligible to a large majority of readers both learned and unlearned, and discernible only by a few. The incomprehensibility therefore, or ambiguous obscurity of certain passages, or their inconsistency with reason or with other parts of scripture which are clear

clear and plain and universally intelligible, may furnish us with a very strong argument to shew that unless there are satisfactory marks of their interpolation, the scriptures which contain them cannot be the works of the apostles or primitive disciples of Jesus Christ; but whilst those scriptures and those passages are allowed to be genuine, the sense in which the many, not that in which the few readers understand them, must be supposed to be the sense in which God intended they should be understood.

When you have read the Doctor's answer as it stands in article 3, I beg, Sir, you will turn to p. 226, of my treatise, and read the whole passage which he refers to. The perusal will satisfy you, that all the objections I have there urged remain in full force. But it is curious to see the Doctor defend the authenticity of this Gospel, at the expence of the veracity of those of Matthew and Mark and still determine to adhere to all three as apostolic histories of divine truths.

His remark on article 4. is exactly similar to the last. He allows the contradictory falsehood to exist; and concludes it to be on the part of the writer called Matthew: yet tells you it gives not "any just grounds for arraigning the authenticity" of his Gospel.

In article 5, what little the Doctor has thought fit to advance is merely hypothetical.

To my objection introduced in article 6, the Doctor answers only by asking whether it is necessary, that every true, authentic book of scripture should contain some prophecy? To which I reply, it is absolutely necessary. For since I am assured that *the spirit of prophecy*, not the opinions of the Fathers of the Church or of succeeding commen-
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tators, is *the testimony of Jesus*; I can never admit any book in evidence of *the truth as it is in Jesus*, unless it is stamped with the unquestionable mark of this celestial attestation. When Dr. Priestley tells you that the Gospels “of Matthew and Mark have as much of this internal evidence as that of Luke,” he rashly affirms what it is not in his power to prove; as I have fully shewn in my examination of all the prophecies they severally contain.

In answer to what Dr Priestley is pleased to call my cavil, article 7, he gives you a curious specimen of an *enigma*, which you find consists in a man’s saying that he himself will do, what he knows he can not do, but what he believes another will do for him. As a Christian, the Doctor knows that the same powerful being that raised up Jesus from the dead will also raise him up: but would this warrant his saying, *destroy this body* and in the course of a few years *I will raise it up?* In our Saviour, however, he thinks such an *enigmatical* expression, in plain English, a direct falsehood is very allowable, because “he was in no danger of being understood to say that a dead man could do any thing.” But according to this author Jesus was not properly a man; but, even before his death and resurrection, *the Son of God, the Logos* (which he calls *God himself*) *made flesh*. And Dr. Priestley must be very ignorant of the arguments of the Trinitarians, if he does not know that he has been for several centuries so understood by a great majority of professed Christians; and that much stress is laid on this very passage of scripture to prove the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Having endeavoured to evade one palpable falsehood under the name of an *enigma*, in article 8, he
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tries to get rid of another by denominating it a *figurative expression*. But if the words, *a man shall never see death, shall never taste of death, shall never die* are not plain literal language devoid of every figurative meaning, I should be glad to know what words are so. You and I, Sir, have nothing to do with the frivolous attempts of interpreters to explain away the grossest absurdities by changing the words as well as the sense of the author; but with the obvious meaning of the author's own words; and we know that the words *never die* cannot signify the same as *not die for ever*; and that they are spoken of every man then living who believed on him, not only of those who are to live *at his coming*. I prefer a residence in the country to one in the metropolis; but should I say *I never abode in London*, because *I did not abide there for ever*, no pretence of *figurative meaning* could exculpate me of falsehood.

In article 9, the Doctor not only introduces a remark of mine upon a passage in this Gospel, but also recurs back again to the Gospel of Matthew. If you will take the trouble of turning to both the pages of my book, which he has quoted, you will find in them both several irreconcilable contradictions stated, which must be absolute falsehoods on one side or the other; and, in that respecting John's Gospel, one unanswerable argument urged to prove that the author could not be a Jew. Of all these Dr. Priestley takes not the least notice; but in reply to my objection to both passages on account of the power said to be given to the Apostles of forgiving or retaining whosesoever sins they pleased, he tells you it was a power exerted by our Saviour himself. One of the very
terms,

terms, indeed, of the new Covenant is the remission of all past sins to those who faithfully receive it, and so far all its preachers must declare : but when did Jesus *retain* any person's sins ? The Doctor tells you also that, " whatever power Jesus had he transferred it to the Apostles." If this were true, Sir, since one of those powers must have been the power of transferring them to others, the Apostles too, as the Priesthood of the *orthodox* and *holy Catholic Church* affirms, have transferred the very same powers to their successors ; and every Priest regularly ordained has *now* the power of forgiving or retaining sins at pleasure. Who then can wonder at the earnest contention of even the reformed Churches to prove their lineal succession from the Apostles ? And what a pity it is that the Doctor's anti-episcopal ordination should bar his claim to that valuable transfer ! Otherwise he might have opened as pretty and perhaps as lucrative an office for *indulgencies*, *absolutions*, and *anathemas*, as any Roman-Catholic Priest or even the Pope himself.

The only thing deserving your or my attention in what the Doctor has said on article 10, is his assertion that God has been and will be worshipped with sacrifices and oblations *under the new covenant* ; that is, by the faithful members of that covenant. To prove the first part of an assertion so repugnant to reason and to the plain sense of the most authentic scriptures, he refers you to the case of Jesus and his Apostles who worshipped God according to the rites of Moses ; and for the latter, to his own peculiar opinion that, at the conversion of the Jews to Christianity, their temple at Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and the Mosaic ritual of oblations and
burnt

burnt offerings reestablished. But whatever weight his opinion may have with himself, as far as I can judge, it will, in this case, have none at all with any other thinking man. As to Jesus and his Apostles, it must be remembered that the promulgation of the new covenant did not commence till the day of Pentecost, after our Lord's ascension; and that the religion of that new covenant cannot, in any sense, be said to have been properly established in the world till after the old covenant had been providentially abolished by the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem.

Article 11, is divided into two distinct parts; and what the Doctor has insinuated in the first rests entirely upon suppositions of the ancients and himself, made without the slightest foundation from the scriptures. Their recourse therefore to such hypotheses shews they were aware of the difficulty, but does not remove it. The second part relates to the case of Lazarus, who, Dr. Priestley intimates, was "ready to leave all and follow him, but that Jesus had not required of him so to do." But when you consider that, on his sending out the seventy other disciples to announce the speedy approach of the new covenant of the kingdom of God, he told them * that *the harvest was plenteous, but the labourers few*; and directed them to pray *to the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into his harvest*; when he told the young pharisee § that, if he would complete his virtuous disposition, he must sell and distribute all he had and come and follow him; can you believe that any man could be his dearest and most beloved friend, who never followed him, nor gave up any worldly comfort or convenience,

* Luke x. 2.

§ Luke xviii. 22.

venience, nor took the least pains to forward the important object of his mission; but continued to live inactively until his death with his family at Bethany; and then, according to this history, was most miraculously restored to life again, only that he might remain as useless for the purpose of preaching the Gospel of the new covenant, as he had been before.

In article 12, the Doctor has quoted my objection to the miraculous transformation of water into wine; but he has not said one word that can tend to render credible a miracle in its very nature so highly improper and improbable.

In article 13, he acknowledges that the story alluded to is attended with *considerable difficulties*, which he does not even attempt to remove; only with a view to obviate one difficulty arising from our Saviour's being made to say that the time of that conversation was four months before the harvest, he tells you, *that* is not the meaning of the words; but it is merely a proverbial expression denoting that "the natural harvest followed the seed time, at the distance of four months." If Dr. Priestley, at his time of life, is really unacquainted with the seasons of seed-time and harvest in the climate of Palestine, since the duties of his profession required of him a perfect knowledge of the manners and customs of the inhabitants, such ignorance must appear as culpable, as it is unaccountable. Yet since it would be still more unpardonable in him, wilfully to assert a falsehood, we must suppose that he does not know at what season their corn was sown. Please, therefore to inform him that, if he will turn to the conclusion of Genesis, c. 8, he will find *seed-time and harvest* put for seasons of the year as diametrically opposite to each other as *summer and winter,*

winter, and used with the latter to denote the four regular seasons of the year, instead of *autumn and spring*. Their barley harvest began first; and, if he will look for the word Barley in Calmet's dictionary, he will find that in Judea *it was sown* in autumn and reaped in spring. Or, if he will consult the travels of the liberal-minded, intelligent Volney into Egypt and Syria c. 20. sec. 9, he will see that, from the nature of that climate it is impossible it should be otherwise; for that there are no rains to render the grounds cultivable except about the times of the equinoxes; that, therefore, after the autumnal rains are over, the inhabitants sow their barley and wheat in October, and begin their harvest in April; so that the distance between the two seasons is not *four*, but *six months*; and the words of this Gospel are capable of no other sense than that in which I understand them.

To my remark quoted in article 14, the answer is quite hypothetical.

In article 15, to what I have said of the incredible history of the Pool of Bethesda, the Doctor mentions an interpolation of the passage which describes the miraculous virtue of the water; an interpolation that may well be doubted of, (though some copyists have omitted the passage, convinced perhaps from the silence of every other writer that it could not be true,) because the impotent man's answer to our Saviour implies the very same; and seems to stand in need of the fourth and latter part of the third verse to make it clearly intelligible. But suppose the whole to be a groundless fiction palmed upon the writer, "how, says the Doctor, does this affect his character? He might have been credulous, in this respect, and yet his history not

the less authentic." You see, Sir, that according to Dr. Priestley provided you allow these books to be the genuine works of the apostles, you may deem the writers themselves to be as ignorant, ill-informed, superstitious, credulous old fools as you please. But I, Sir, and I hope you, expect the chosen messengers of heaven to be men of a very different character from this; which must as effectually destroy all rational confidence in what they have told us, as if they were convicted of wilful falsehood. And indeed if John was the writer of this Gospel, he must also have been the author of this absurd fiction, for he lived long at Jerusalem, and therefore must have known it to be false. As he was one of the twelve too, he must have been present with his master at the time when the miracle is said to be wrought, so that he must relate it as a fact of which he himself was eye-witness, and not as a thing *taken for granted* upon the credit of another narrator.

The numerous contradictions stated in the passage quoted from my book in article 16, Dr. Priestley allows to exist; but tells you, it is more probable that the misinformation, i. e. the falsehood, should be on the part of Luke's narration than of John's. Should it appear so to you, Sir, I have indeed written to little purpose. But then you must of necessity reject the Gospel of Luke out of your creed: for I cannot persuade myself that you also can be so irrational, as to believe the truth of two histories which flatly contradict each other. As to the groundless supposition "*about the preparation of the passover,*" it will not bear a moment's consideration; because when the author asserts that the rulers of the Jews went not into the judgment hall, that they might not by contamination be prevented

ed from eating *the Passover*, he plainly tells us that the Passover remained to be eaten; whereas, according to all the other Gospels, it had been eaten the evening before.

I will not so far affront your understanding, as to take any notice of the remaining suppositions of the Doctor's ninth letter. But with respect to the circumstance of our Lord's washing the apostle's feet upon what authority can he, who allows the truth of this history, presume to say that it was not "intended to be imitated literally?" When the express words of Jesus are said to be, *If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet; (and he had literally washed them;) ye also ought (without doubt literally) to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.*

The Doctor's tenth letter to you is on the subject of the Epistle to the Romans; and he begins with telling you, I ought to say "what, in my idea, constitutes a *canonical book* of the New Testament." By a *canonical book*, I suppose he means a book worthy to be admitted by a rational christian as the rule of his religious faith and practice. To constitute such a book, Sir, in my idea, it is indispensably requisite, that it should be free from all grounds of reasonable doubt and suspicion; that it should have every possible *external* testimony in its favour; and contain every necessary *internal* evidence of its being the work of an apostle or some other primitive disciple of Jesus commissioned by him and both naturally and supernaturally qualified to proclaim and teach the religion of the new covenant of the kingdom of God: and I think myself abundantly warranted in rejecting out of my canon of holy scripture every book or every passage of a book which is
unable

unable to stand these tests of examination. The Epistle to the Romans, after mature and impartial examination, appears to me to be one of those and therefore I reject it, notwithstanding its containing what Dr. Priestley is pleased to call an *important prophecy*; for it is so far from being a prophecy peculiar to this Epistle, that it is merely a reference to pre-existing prophecies attended with such observations upon the state of the Jewish nation at the time of writing the Epistle, as plainly shew that it could not be written by any body till after their final dispersion by the Romans.

In article 1, the Doctor controverts some observations of mine founded on the information given us in the last chapter of the acts of the Apostles. First he is pleased to quibble about my having asked, who that other *Apostle to the Gentiles* was who preceded St. Paul at Rome? As if I, or any person who had read that history, could suppose that none but the twelve disciples of Jesus emphatically called *Apostles* were commissioned to preach the Gospel. I used the word there in its general sense of *missionary*; and if either you or the Doctor choose to substitute *preacher of the Gospel* in its room, it will answer my purpose equally well.

He next tells you that, contrary to what I apprehend to be the sense of the historian, "it is *evident* that they were *Christians* who met Paul at Puteoli and Appii Forum." Yet the only circumstances, from which this *evident* proposition is inferred, are that they are called *Brethren*; and that upon some of them coming from Rome to Appii Forum to meet them, *Paul thanked God and took courage*. Now, Sir, young as you are, you must know that though Christians called each other *bre-*
thren,

thren, because they were taught to regard themselves as adopted sons of God, who like Jesus were to be begotten by God to a future life of immortality; and who, in the interim, composed under the new covenant one common family, united by the bands of Christian love and benevolence; as the Jews under the old covenant were literally all one family, the common sons of Abraham, and heirs of the promises made to him through Isaac; yet that, throughout the whole history of the Acts, the Apostles and other Christian teachers always call even the unconverted Jews *brethren*; and that such they certainly were. From the word *Brethren* alone, therefore, it is impossible to discover whether the persons here spoken of were Jews or Christians. But Dr. Priestley insinuates that they must have been Christians, because, on seeing those who came from Rome to meet them, it is said Paul took courage. Before this time, Sir, you have seen that the Doctor and I view the same objects through such different mental optics, that you will not be surpris'd to find that the very circumstance of Paul's taking courage at their sight, helps to convince me that they must be Jews. For it was against an accusation of the Jews that Paul had appeal'd unto Cæsar, and to be tried before the Emperor was the cause of his being brought prisoner to Rome. In such a situation, any friendly notice taken of him by Christians, had there been any there at that time, however agreeable to him, could have given him no cause of courage or confidence respecting his expected imprisonment and hearing before Nero: but such a token of national friendship from the Jews of Rome might well give him courage and confidence in his cause; as it was an

evident

evident proof that they had not been instigated against him by their brethren in Judea; and that no Jew there was prepared to carry on the prosecution against him. Yet such a conclusion Dr. Priestley thinks *very extraordinary*; and would persuade you that there was a Christian Church at Rome “consisting of both Jews and Gentiles,” before Paul was commissioned to preach the Gospel in Greece: though there is not in any other history the slightest foundation for such an opinion; though it is directly contrary to the history of Silas or Luke, which plainly teaches us that the light of the Gospel proceeded from Jerusalem, as from a centre, extending itself gradually in all directions, and that before the vision of Paul at Troas, Christianity had never been taught beyond the limits of Asia towards Europe; though the Jews at Rome were so far from knowing that any of the Gentiles had been converted, that they spoke of Christians to St. Paul as of a *sect* only of their own nation; and though, on their rejecting the doctrine of the Gospel preached by him to them first, as was his custom every where, he told them *that* salutary doctrine was to be preached to the Gentiles also, and *they*, says he, *will bear, not have heard it*, which latter phrase he must have used, if a *Christian Church of Jews and Gentiles* had been established at Rome some years before.

What the Doctor has thought proper to add respecting the public reading of the Epistles in Christian Churches will be considered, when I come to give a general reply to all his arguments of that kind.

In articles 2 and 3, nothing is advanced which *you*, Sir, can think merits a reply. But he tries to evade

evade the insuperable objection alluded to in article 4, by supposing that the writer did not speak of the severity of God towards the Jews displayed in their *fall*, their *casting away*, and their being *cut off*, in reference to events already past; but as prophetically foreseeing that this severe infliction of the divine judgments would come upon them a few years afterwards in consequence of their *general unbelief*. It is not possible, however, that any writer endowed with common sense should argue in such a manner, and expect to convince any body by reasoning upon predicted events before their accomplishment, as if they had already taken place. Paul could not call upon the Romans to *behold* that *severity* of the divine justice, which existed only in idea; and which they could not be certain would ever be inflicted till the prophecies which excited that idea were fulfilled by the event. Our Saviour simply predicted, during his life, his own resurrection; and after that event was accomplished, he informed his disciples and they taught all other converts to the religion of the new covenant that; as he *the first fruits was risen*, so they also would be raised from the dead *at his coming*. But had Jesus and those he commissioned to announce the approach of the Gospel covenant whilst he was alive, because of that prediction, called out upon the people to *behold* that Jesus the first fruits was risen from the dead; and that therefore all who would become his disciples would rise to another life after death, instead of convincing any body, their hearers must have concluded that they were absolutely out of their senses.

In the first article of his eleventh letter, the Doctor makes a very feeble attempt to evade one
part

part of my objection to the Epistle to the Ephesians arising from the language in which the author addresses them, which is that of an entire stranger, though Paul was the first preacher of Christianity at Ephesus; but he takes not the least notice of that still more insuperable part of it, which arises from the writer's doubting whether they *had heard* of his Apostleship, and referring to a former letter he had written to them, as the only means *whereby they might understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ*. To seem to make amends, however, for this extraordinary omission in himself, the Doctor tells you that "Ignatius appears to have read the Epistle to the Ephesians; and Polycarp that to the Philippians." This he infers from certain dubious passages in the Epistles published in their names. But I do assure you, Sir, after examining all the evidence that can be produced in their favour, I am thoroughly satisfied (as I thought Dr. Priestley must have been) that those Epistles were neither the production of the pens nor of the age of Polycarp and Ignatius: although, were they ever so genuine, and the passages alluded to ever so explicit, such a reference could never prove those two Epistles to have been written by St. Paul. It would only prove that *their* faith in Christ, like that of so many millions more, of their own and later times, was not duly combined with *knowledge* and *understanding*.

The Doctor's attempt to answer my objections mentioned in the second article, consists entirely in hypothesis. And those of the five or six remaining articles he assures you are so *manifestly weak* and *trifling* that "it cannot be necessary to reply to them" there is therefore nothing for me to answer; and

and all you have to do, Sir, is to read my book attentively and judge for yourself.

Before he concludes this letter he thinks proper again to represent me to you as perfectly unacquainted with the sources of his own profound learning and critical science; and tells you that “if Mr. Evanſon had read that truly maſterly piece of criticiſm, the *Horæ Paulinæ* of Mr. Paley, he would have ſaved himſelf the trouble of writing his treatiſe, and him that of answering it.” Now, Sir, happening to have ſome perſonal knowledge of Mr. Paley, and being well acquainted with his eminent abilities, erudition and liberal candour, I read that work almoſt as ſoon as it was publiſhed, with avidity and with the greater attention, becauſe of the judgment I myſelf had long formed of thoſe very Epistles. And I devoutly wiſh that every profeſſional teacher of religion would imitate the worthy Archdeacon’s highly meritorious example in ſo diligent, rational and uſeful a mode of ſtudying the ſacred ſcriptures. I know nothing which would more effectually lead to the diſtinction of authentic from ſpurious ſcriptures, of religious truth from fabulous falſehood. But the reſult of my reading Mr. Paley’s ingenious performance, (which I earneſtly recommend to your peruſal, for the ſame purpoſe) was to ſtrengthen my conviction that thoſe Epistles of Paul, which I have ſtated as his, were really written by that Apoſtle; whilſt the arguments deduced from the ſame ſource in favour of thoſe which I reject are to me by no means equally ſatisfactory; and ſeem far from ſufficient to remove the objections which I have urged againſt their authenticity.

The twelfth and concluding letter with which Dr. Priestley has favoured you, Sir, is of a very extraordinary kind indeed. As if I had given no reasons for my preference of the Gospel of Luke; as if I had not produced internal evidence of the authenticity of both his histories far superior to any thing contained in the three other Gospels; he again misrepresents me to you as having been led to give that preference by mere chance or caprice, and goes on to amuse himself with giving you a few specimens of the manner in which, he says, I might have “objected to the Gospel of Luke, had I been previously so disposed.” Yet this same Gentleman, in his preface to these letters, tells you, p. 7, that “in my early years I must have been taught and habituated to peruse the whole of the New Testament with nearly equal respect.” How then could I be *previously disposed* to object to any of them? How could I be induced to prefer one Gospel and reject the others, by any other motives than those which a more studious and attentive perusal of those scriptures, and of the historical evidence adduced in their favour, suggested to my mind? Those motives and the arguments on which they are founded are now before the public; and if they are really futile and weak, as the Doctor repeatedly tells you they are, it must be very easy to refute them: Dr. Priestley, however, is very far from having refuted even such of them as he has picked out on purpose to answer; and many of the strongest and most important he has passed over in profound silence. Of the proofs urged that the pretended Matthew and John could not be Jews, because their writings shew that they did not even reckon their time as the Jews did, with
several

several other objections, which do not apply to Luke, and which are equally difficult to surmount, he takes not the least notice. And though in p. 40, he has, in a very mutilated, unfair manner, quoted the conclusion of the argument stated in my preface as arising from the prophecies, to shew that, in order to their completion, it is absolutely necessary that several of the canonical scriptures of the Apostate Church should be found fabulous and false, especially those on which her fundamental articles of faith are built, he does not make the least mention of the argument itself.

I have already replied to what he here repeats concerning interpolations, which comes with a very ill grace from a man who himself asserts there are so many, besides transpositions not only of single passages, but of entire chapters: and I certainly shall not waste your time nor my own in remarking the objections which he says might be made to those parts of the Gospel of Luke that I have endeavoured to prove could not be written by him.

As to the inconsistency between Luke and Paul respecting the five hundred brethren by whom the latter says Jesus was seen after his resurrection, if it was before his ascension, Luke has been so particularly exact in stating the number of the disciples at that period, and their subsequent gradual increase to five thousand, that the error must be in St. Paul's Epistle, not of his making, but made perhaps undesignedly by the transcriber's mistaking the letter ρ, 100, for the letter φ, 500: for if, as appears most probable, all his disciples that attended him to Jerusalem were witnesses of his ascension, since their number amounted to about 120, St. Paul might justly say *he was seen by above 100*
brethren

brethren at once; but his disciples never amounted to 500, before the day of Pentecost.

That Dr. Priestley should understand being cast into unquenchable fire, (the figurative phrase used by the Baptist and in the book of the Revelation, to denote what Paul, in plain language, calls *utter destruction*) to signify the same as existence in *everlasting punishment*, appears very extraordinary to me. But it is still more surprising that, on such an occasion, he should refer you to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; for it is an apologue founded upon the popular, superstitious ideas of the Jews, with a view, like that of all other apologues, to enforce upon them a particular doctrine. He therefore who should from that parable infer any thing respecting the intermediate state of the dead, might just as reasonably infer from the apologue of the bramble and fruit trees in the old Testament that, in Judea, the trees spoke like men and elected themselves a king. The parable, however, teaches one and that the only doctrine it was designed to teach in a manner so striking, as merited much greater attention from Dr. Priestley than he seems hitherto to have thought proper to pay it. Its sole and obvious intent was to teach the hearers and through them all mankind, that *the testimony of prophecy* is the only necessary, the only satisfactory evidence of the certainty of revealed religion: and that wherever that fails, the greatest of miracles would be unable to work conviction. *If, says our Lord, they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* Such is the doctrine of this parable; and the whole history of the Jews from the resurrection of Jesus to the present time, is the most convincing proof of its truth. Yet rather

rather than relinquish his old prejudices and his habitual veneration for *the Fathers* of the Apostate Church, and agree in sentiment with such an *injurious, capricious, indecent, trifling, weak caviller* as he tells you I am, the Doctor scruples not to contradict the notorious experience of so many centuries; the plain doctrine and express words of his Saviour; and the repeated instructions of God himself by the prophets of the old Covenant: and, in defiance of them all, contends that the mere historic evidence of past miracles is *the proper and universally satisfactory testimony* of the truth and authenticity of the new Covenant of the Gospel !!!

Of the remaining objections suggested by Dr. Priestley, which I have not already noticed either in this letter or in my obnoxious book itself, I shall only observe, first, that if you will read over what I have said respecting the Epistle to the Philipians instead of taking the Doctor's word, you will find that I never accused the writer of using abusive language, when he admonished them to *beware of dogs*. Knowing the order of men amongst them to whom the Greeks usually gave that appellation, my ideas of his meaning, as you must perceive, were of a very different kind. Secondly, that I do not understand what there is objectionable in Luke, xv. 7, nor do I comprehend either the *wit* or the *ingenuity* of falsifying the words of some and misrepresenting the sense of all the four preceding passages quoted also from Luke, only to make them appear capable of being objected to.

You cannot but have remarked, Sir, in reading these letters of Dr. Priestley, that whilst he censures me so severely for giving an unreasonable preference to the Gospel of Silas or Luke, he him-
self

self has conceived contrary prejudices against it; and regards its authority as far inferior to that of the other three. And to induce you to believe that my favourable opinion of so truly respectable an historian, as Luke must appear to every impartial scholar who reads him with due attention, is peculiar to myself; and that the opinion of every learned commentator coincides with his own, he quotes a passage from Professor Michaelis's *Introduction to the New Testament*, which seems to assert that there are as many apparent contradictions with ancient writers in Luke's *Gospel* alone, as in all the other *Gospels* put together. Far be it from me to insinuate any thing against the Doctor's moral character for veracity in the ordinary commerce of life! I am confident it is unimpeachable. But, whether it is owing to intemperate controversial zeal or to an inconsiderate precipitancy in writing I know not, I am sorry to be forced to assure you, Sir, that as a polemic divine, the truth of his assertions and the fidelity of his quotations are not always to be depended upon. Of this the quotation now before us affords another proof in addition to what you have already seen. In the first place, Dr. Priestley asserts that in this passage "Michaelis is speaking of the *Gospel* of Luke." Yet in the page from whence he has transcribed his quotation his *Gospel* is not so much as mentioned; and the instances of this apparent contradiction, which Michaelis first examines in the following pages, are all taken from the *Acts of the Apostles*. After shewing that those cases when properly investigated tend only to corroborate Luke's credit as an historian, he does indeed adduce one and only one instance in his *Gospel* of real and direct contradiction to Josephus and to both the
public

public annals and particular historians of the Roman Empire. And what, Sir, do you imagine this important instance is? It is the fabulous story of the taxation in the second chapter, which the Doctor himself rejects as a spurious interpolation, and which, I trust, I have demonstrated, upon the testimony of Luke himself, was not written by him. The words too, which Dr. Priestley has quoted are only the conclusion of a sentence, the preceding part of which is as follows. "Of all the sacred authors, there is no one, who so frequently stands exposed to this charge (of disagreeing with profane history) as St. Luke, who in all other respects *appears to the most advantage when put in competition with other writers.*" Now, Sir, since Michaelis himself has in this very section most ably obviated all the objections of that kind, which are made to his *Acts of the Apostles*, had he been convinced of the spuriousness of the two first chapters of his *Gospel*, as the Doctor and I are, the only objection to that also being completely done away, his final judgment of Luke must have remained the same as mine, viz. that when compared with the other writers of the Gospel, he is, *in all respects*, entitled to that preference, which Dr. Priestley is so unwilling to allow him.

The Doctor triumphantly closes his last letter to you with an elegant and ingenious, but merely technical, sophistical declamation of the same learned German theologian, calculated to persuade not convince his readers of the authenticity of the scriptures of the New Testament. Allowing it its utmost force, it can prove nothing more than that those writings existed in the times of the earliest Fathers of the Church whose works have come down to us, that is, as I myself have stated it, in
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the latter end of the second century. But the mention made of them by writers who lived so long after the death of the Apostles can afford no proof of their being written by the persons whose names they bear. We should have no satisfactory testimony of the authenticity of Cæsar's Commentaries, or the works of any other profane writer, were they not mentioned by such men as Cicero and Hirtius, who lived at the time of their publication and were personally acquainted with the author. Yet, surely, Sir, every wise man will demand as much fuller and clearer evidence of the authenticity of the sacred scriptures, than of Cæsar's Commentaries, as the truth or falsehood of the information they contain is of greater importance to him. Besides, the circumstances attending the Gospels and the writings of any profane author are totally dissimilar. The same testimony, which assures me that Cæsar or Cicero wrote a book, informs me also that no other such book was written upon the same subject; and therefore when I find that book, on a perusal perceive it to correspond to the account given of it by contemporary writers, and consider that there is no probability of their having had any motive to impose an useless falsehood upon posterity, I doubt not of its being the genuine work of the author to whom it is attributed, especially since whether it be so or not is of very trifling importance. But with respect to the evangelical histories, the same historic evidence, which tells me that any, informs me also that many Gospels were written by different authors, several of whom could not be depended upon for the fidelity of their narration and the *certainty** of the facts recorded by them.

That

* Compare Luke, i. 1, and 4.

That all the Gospels extant even in the first century were not written by the apostles, I am convinced by the testimony of a writer, who was himself a supernaturally gifted preacher of the new covenant, and an intimate friend and companion of all the apostles; and I have not either his testimony or that of any one other contemporary to make me believe that any of the twelve apostles ever wrote a Gospel. But I have the testimony of the apostle Paul himself assuring me that, even in his time, the genuine doctrines of Christianity began to be perverted and corrupted: and not only his, but the testimony of *the spirit of prophecy* informing me that the true religion of Jesus would, at no great distance of time after the apostolic age, be supplanted, during several centuries, by an irrational, impious superstition diametrically opposite to it, founded upon *fables, falsehood, and lying miracles*. Now, Sir, the Scriptures of the New Testament, as they exist in the present canon, are the avowed and sole foundation of the only Church which has ever been established, since the æra of Christianity, within those countries to which the long duration of the predicted apostasy is limited. Under such circumstances, therefore, whatever *they* may say, whose professional interest it is to keep religion upon something like its present footing, be the canonical scriptures of that Church true or false; it, surely, behoves you and me and every other disinterested, prudent person to be scrupulously nice about the authenticity of those writings on which we build *our* faith in the revelation by Jesus Christ; not to be satisfied with *probability*, where we have a right to expect *certainty*; much less to suffer the unfounded though positive assertions of professional

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theologians

theologians to supply the place of that proof, which it is out of their power to produce.

Dr. Priestley, like many other defenders of the received scriptures, has confidently told you* that, "in all the time (from the year 64 to the age of Justin Martyr) the scriptures of the New Testament, as well as those of the old, were constantly and publicly read in all Christian Churches, as they are now." Had this been true, Sir, since it is unreasonable to expect his antagonist to prove the negative, which is often impossible, he ought to have produced some evidence of the matter of fact, which was the more necessary, because the well known difficulty and expence of multiplying copies of books, in those times, sufficiently to answer such a purpose, renders the fact highly improbable and next to impossible till after the lapse of a considerable number of years. Accordingly, whoever is well versed in the Ecclesiastical history of the second century will be forced to agree with that honest, diligent and learned investigator Mr. Dodwell, that the earliest date, at which the general reception of books under the name of *Gospels* took place amongst Christians, was the very latter end of Trajan's or beginning of Hadrian's reign. That of the Epistles, as appears from Justin himself, took place much later. In the mean time, Christians were divided into a multiplicity of different sects; and of the great number of spurious scriptures with which that century abounded, and to distinguish which from those that were authentic there was no fixed, certain criterion, many, without doubt, were compiled from other writings, traditional tales, and, perhaps, their own superstitious fancies,

* P. 12 and 13.

fancies, by the partizans of the several sects; all of which adopted the use only of such scriptures as accorded best with their particular prejudices. Thus the Nazarenes and Ebionites used only one *Gospel to the Hebrews*, written in the hebrew language, which Dr. Priestley not only without, but against proof contends, after Dr. Lardner, was a translation of what is now called the Gospel of the Apostle Matthew: and the Marcionites admitted only the Gospel of Luke and rejected all the rest.

Even in Justin Martyr's time, who is the first writer that mentions the reading of any scriptures in the Christian Churches, it is so far from certain that the Gospels, used in the congregations he frequented, were the same that we use now, that the difference observable between several of his quotations and the corresponding passages in our scriptures seem to prove that they were not the same. And of the Epistles he is totally silent, in the circumstantial account he gives of all that passed in their religious assemblies, which, had they been then read in all the Churches, as the Doctor supposes, he could not have been.

From the manner in which Eusebius tells us Papias mentioned the Gospel of Matthew, it is plain it could not in his time be generally read in Churches; because he speaks of it as an hebrew writing not translated, and intimates that few could interpret it. And, what amounts almost to a demonstrative proof that the custom of reading the apostolic scriptures in Christian Churches did not prevail in Trajan's time, notwithstanding the contrary tradition, is the well known account of the Christians, within his government, transmitted by the younger Pliny to that Emperor. Had they
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made use of any books in their religious meetings, he must have been informed of it by those whom he inquired of, and even examined by torture; and since he could by no other means acquire so satisfactory an account of their religious principles to communicate to the Emperor, as by the perusal of those books, he must have read and mentioned them in his letter. Yet he tells Trajan that all which passed, in their early, morning assemblies, was prayer and a mutual engagement to be guilty of no kind of immorality; and that, in the evening of the same appointed day, they met again only to partake of a common and innocent supper.

After the extension of the empire by the conquests of Trajan, a wider field being opened for the propagation of the Christian doctrines, especially in the East, the missionaries of the several sects, not having the miraculous powers, which accompanied the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel to evince the divine authority of what they taught, stood in need of written accounts of the doctrines and miracles of the preceding age, which they might produce as authentic memoirs of the apostles themselves or of some of their heavenly commissioned associates. Hence sprung that great number of copies of both spurious and genuine scriptures with which the middle and latter end of the second century abounded, which ever after supplied the churches every where, both for public and private reading. And as no church then assumed authority to discriminate the spurious from the authentic Gospels and Epistles, every sect and every individual Christian was at free liberty to admit or reject whatever scriptures seemed most to favour or to contradict the prejudices they had severally

severally imbibed: for which reason almost every quotation from them, till after the time of Justin Martyr, is made without any reference to the particular book from whence the words are taken and without any mention of the writer's name, contrary to the uniform practice of all commentators and theologians ever since the establishment of a canon of the Christian Scriptures.

The sect which had adopted the pagan idea of the pre-existence and incarnation of a celestial being in the person of Jesus, as it was most likely should happen amongst the converts from paganism, proved greatly predominant over the rest, in the close of the second and through the whole of the third century; and after some violent contests between its two grand subdivisions, which were afterwards denominated Arians and Athanasians, laid the lasting foundation of that Apostate Church, which in the fourth century was established by the civil power and hath ever since been distinguished by the appellation of the *Orthodox* and *Holy Catholic Church*. That professed Christians of this sect should eagerly receive the first and fourth of our Gospels, and acknowledge them for genuine writings of two of the Apostles, no impartial reader of them can wonder. But the Gospel of Luke, as he himself tells us it was written by him, would have entirely overset their whole system: there can be no doubt, therefore, that their wish was to reject that Gospel entirely; and the author of the Gospel falsely called Matthew's seems by his deviations from and contradictions to Luke's narrative, at the same time that he was borrowing so largely from him in the compilation of his own, to have hoped altogether to supersede the use of it.

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Providentially, however, Luke was the writer and the only writer of another, a still more important history, describing the state of Christianity during a period of above thirty years, and consisting of so great a variety of local and personal circumstances, that its place could not be so easily supplied by any forged, spurious writing as that of the history of the very short period of the public ministry of Jesus; and the reference made in that to his former history, having made his Gospel known, put this out of their power. All they could do, therefore, was, what they have done, to counteract the plain and universally intelligible truths of his original Gospel, by an insertion of the fabulous history of the miraculous births of John the Baptist and of Jesus, and by interspersions of a few passages here and there favourable to their own religious doctrines. As to the Gospel attributed to Mark, being scarcely any thing more than a transcript from those of Matthew and Luke, it could not be objectionable to men who received both those Gospels; and as it completed the number four, it gave the Ecclesiastical rhetoricians an opportunity of urging *satisfactory* reasons for rejecting all the other numerous Gospels and consigning them to destruction, because these four were *evidently* designed by God to correspond to the four cardinal points of that world for whose use they were intended; to the four seasons of the year; the four cardinal virtues &c. &c. and therefore the number of the true Gospels could be neither greater nor less than four.

When once the *Fathers* of the apostate Church of the second and third centuries had established these principles and these scriptures as the foundation

dation of their religious faith, it could not be but that their *Sons*, the members of the same Church in its more mature state of depravity, and of the several sects, which through the jarring interests and passions of superstitious men have arisen from it, would unite their efforts in defending them.

It is easy to trace the existence of these scriptures through a series of champions and commentators from the eighteenth century through the seventeenth, to the sixteenth, fifteenth and so on till we arrive at the fifth century; but *that* affords us a striking instance of the capricious, unwarrantable manner in which the present canon of scriptures of the New Testament was formed. For though the only traditional or historic evidence respecting any of those scriptures must have been much stronger to the nominal Christians of the fourth century than was possible to those of the fifth, as being so much nearer to the times when they were written; yet the latter added to the canon the Epistle to the Hebrews, with four or five others, and the book of the Revelation, all which were left out of the canon first formed by the church in the fourth century, as being either spurious or of doubtful authority. And this additional part of the canon even Dr. Priestley you see receives and defends as certainly genuine, and of equal authority with the rest, excepting the Apocalypse, against which he seems to have formed a prejudice still greater than against the gospel of Luke. This prejudice, however, both in him and in the Fathers of the Church of the fourth century, is a convincing proof how little satisfactory all the boasted *evidence of testimony* of the first ages of Christianity is, respecting the authenticity of these books, where
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the mind is not previously disposed to acknowledge it. For, as Sir Isaac Newton hath long ago observed, there is no scripture of the whole canon so early quoted and commented upon as the Apocalypse. The references plainly made to it in the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Thessalonians shew that it was the first of all the genuine scriptures; and Justin Martyr, as well as Ireneus, not only quotes from it the particular prophecy of the Millennium, but speaks of it as universally acknowledged to have been written by John an Apostle of Jesus Christ: whereas, when Clement and Justin quote any passages from the Gospels, or histories of the ministry of Jesus, they never ascribe the books they quote from to any particular, known authors; and a comparison of their quotations with the similar passages in our Gospels shews that the books they have quoted from were not the same with ours. When, therefore, we continue to trace out the links of this celebrated chain of external evidence of the authenticity of the scriptures, through Origen and the other Fathers of the third century, beyond the close of the second, we find our investigation arrested by an insuperable chasm through which it is impossible to carry on the testimonial connection up to the apostolic age. On the contrary, many circumstances present themselves to our consideration, which render it highly probable and credible that not one of the apostles of Jesus ever wrote a Gospel; at least there does not appear, in that early period, the slightest evidence that those Gospels were written by them, which the *orthodox*, apostate Church hath so long received under their names. Howsoever ingeniously wrought, then, and highly polished many of the
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lower links of this chain may be, and howsoever beautiful they may appear when fresh from the hands of the skilful artists so implicitly confided in by Dr. Priestley, when we attentively examine the first and uppermost link, on which the whole weight must necessarily depend, we find it merely ideal and hypothetical. Such defective testimony as this I, for my part, can never admit, unless where it is corroborated by the *internal* evidence of authenticity which the scripture itself affords; much less where it is obviously opposed by certain, or even strongly dubious, internal marks of spuriousness and fraud.

Let me then, Sir, as a perfectly disinterested friend, again advise you to examine thoroughly and think for yourself; not to found an edifice of such vast importance to you as that of your religious faith upon the unsubstantial, fallible opinions and sophistical arguments of theologians of ever so great renown; *that your faith may not stand in the wisdom of men*: but on that only proper and firm foundation, to which you are directed by the express words of God and Jesus Christ, the testimony of completed prophecy, that is, *in the power of God*.

You are told by these learned and celebrated critics, that there is the same proof of the authenticity of all the scriptures, that there is of the authenticity of the works of any profane author. Were this assertion true, would that be sufficient for the important occasion? The almighty parent of mankind, knowing he hath formed our minds liable to be influenced by motives, hath, in the revelation of the new covenant by Jesus Christ, set before us the noblest and most powerful motives that can be conceived to induce us to adopt that

course of wisdom, virtuous moderation and mutual benevolence, which alone can ensure both the general and particular welfare of our species even in the present life. But to give these motives the due weight of influence upon our minds, a clear conviction of the truth and infallible certainty of that revelation is indispensably requisite. Can any rational creature, then, who is unprejudiced, believe that God has left the only writings which inform us of this revealed covenant, with no better proof of their authenticity than what is produced in behalf of the unimportant works of pagan writers? Yet in reality that sort of proof in favour of the canonical scriptures is far from being so good. For the ordinary works of ancient authors, at the same time that they are subject to none of those circumstances of doubt and distrust, which inevitably arise against the sacred canon from the well-known state of Christianity in the second century, are always attested by the evidence of their contemporaries, a testimony of which most of the scriptures of the New Testament are entirely destitute. Let theological Professors, therefore, declaim ever so skilfully, as long as they rest their sole proof of the certainty of the Gospel revelation, or, which amounts to the same thing, of the truth and authenticity of the only books which contain an account of it, upon *external*, historic evidence, so long must their arguments be unsatisfactory to their own minds, and still more so to other people.

The late Dr. Price was candid and honest enough to confess *his* occasional doubts and distrust, in two celebrated sermons published long before his death; and the Unitarian Committee, who have selected those very sermons to disperse gratuitously

as useful instruction for the common people, must have approved of his avowal, and found it perfectly natural and in unison with their own feelings. Indeed, whether he avows it or not, whenever any Clergyman, either in preaching or writing, argues in behalf of the Christian *profession*, (for it cannot justly be called *faith*) in the manner in which Dr. Priestley argues p. 11, and 12, of his Preface to the letters he has addressed to you, concerning “the great *preponderancy* of evidence in favour of Christianity,” and the rewards of virtue and morality *in this life*, he plainly shews that “the proper and universally satisfactory evidence of testimony” is insufficient to the full conviction of even his own mind; that he is sensible it amounts, at most, only to a certain degree of *probability*; and that, to render it capable of influencing the conduct of intelligent beings, it is necessary to superadd to it those temporal motives, which mere worldly prudence suggests. But how perfectly contemptible all such arguments are, and how unworthy of the Gospel of Christ, you may judge, by applying them to the case of the apostles and first converts to the faith of the new Covenant, who with firmness and even cheerfulness resigned every consideration of the advantages of *this life*, and even life itself, in perfect confidence of obtaining by means of that very resignation, the Gospel promises of futurity.

Instead, therefore, of implicitly receiving all the fabulous, inconsistent, contradictory scriptures of the apostate church, as Christian truths, upon such defective, fallacious arguments, as can lead you only to scepticism and doubt, try them all by the divinely appointed touchstones of reason and *the spirit of prophecy*. You will then, from that celestial

tial and infallible species of testimony, attain as full conviction of the certainty of revealed religion, and as firm a solidity of faith in Christ as actuated the Christians of the apostolic age. When you have duly contemplated, and compared with the well known events, the predictions recorded in the scriptures of both covenants concerning that wonderful state in which we now behold the nation of the Jews, and which has continued ever since their final dispersion by the Romans; those also foretelling the succession of the predominant civil power in the western countries of the old world and the subdivision of the fourth prevailing empire, within its natural European limits, into the several distinct kingdoms and states, into which we see it now divided; and lastly those prophecies concerning the early apostasy of professed Christians from the genuine doctrines of the Gospel; and the establishment, in all those European kingdoms of an intolerant, blasphemous, antichristian superstition, which should continue during a long series of years. When you consider that these prophecies are recorded by several different writers, living in ages so remote, and in situations so different from each other, that it is impossible to suspect them of collusion, interest, or the least connection of design, nay even of comprehending themselves the whole scope of those predictions of which they were made the instruments. When you observe that no similar circumstances and events had ever before existed amongst men; so that they could not be the objects of human experience or sagacity; and yet that the events predicted, in all these several prophecies, are intimately connected and interwoven with each other in one astonishing, grand, prophetic

tic tissue, which nothing but the power of the Almighty is able to foresee, or finally to accomplish. When you pay to the irresistible force of all this weight of evidence the attention it is entitled to; you will, with me, Sir, find as firm and solid a foundation for your belief of the interposition of the Deity in the important business of revealed religion, as we have for our belief in the existence of a God.

Nominal philosophers, indeed, may so far abuse their reason, as to pretend to believe that an universe, in the whole and in each of its parts fitted and manifestly designed for particular, wise and intelligible ends, subsists without a predisposing, intelligent cause; but the far greater part of a race of rational creatures can never think so unreasonably. The great bulk of mankind, therefore, must always be convinced of the being of a God.

For similar reasons, whenever, instead of assuming the mere external forms of religion, as they do any other early habit, or as a badge of party, men shall be induced to make their religious faith an object of their reason and understanding; shall attentively consider these several prophecies, predicted so many ages previous to the events, by which they were to be completed; and shall become sensible of their wonderfully exact completion, in part already past, and in part speedily approaching; finding it impossible to account for such predictions and their accomplishment, upon the principles of chance or human foresight, unless they act so irrationally, as well as unphilosophically, as to admit that effects, evidently displaying intelligence and premeditated design, can exist without an intelligent, efficient cause, they must plainly

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ly see the extraordinary interposition of the Deity in the course of human affairs; and be convinced of the divine authority of both the Mosaic and Christian Revelations.

I am, Sir, &c. &c.

EDWARD EVANSON.

Great Blakenham,
Feb. 1. 1794.



POSTSCRIPT.

WHILST the foregoing pages were in the press, an *Essay* made its appearance, in *Answer to Evanson's Dissonance and Volney's Ruins*, by the Rev. D. Simpson, M. A. which, after reading it with more attention than it deserves, I take this opportunity of noticing.

Mr. Simpson is minister of the new church at Macclesfield in Cheshire; and states my being a native of that town as a local reason for my books being in several hands there, and for his publishing this compilation from, or rather syllabus of, the ancient ecclesiastical writers, by way of antidote to the infectious influence of reason and fair argument, which he apprehends my *Dissonance* might otherwise spread amongst the inhabitants. But since he has not, by any rational argument of his own, or by any reasoning deduced from that multiplicity of Fathers and Commentators, with repeated enumerations of whose names he has filled his pages, so much as attempted to obviate one of the many objections I have urged against the truth and justice of the decision of those very writers; there is nothing in his publication for me to reply to, except what I have already answered by anticipation, in my preceding remarks upon the general arguments of Dr. Priestley, founded on the
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same authority, For as to his abusive railing, uncharitable censures, and rash pre-condemnation of me before the tribunals both of God and Man, though they are perfectly congenial with, and even characteristic of the *orthodox*, political religion of Mr. Simpson; to return them is directly contrary to the spirit of pure and genuine Christianity, which is the religion I have gratefully embraced upon the full conviction of my reason and understanding; and which alone I publicly and with sincerity of heart profess.

Where a man was born, is a circumstance so perfectly insignificant that, though I am not a native of that town, nor even of that county, I should not have mentioned Mr. Simpson's mistake in that particular, but for the sake of observing that, if either through misinformation or fallacious inference deduced from certain premises he himself can be led to give an erroneous account of the author of a book published in his own time, much more easily may those early writers, in whom he places such entire confidence, have also erred in their accounts of the authors of books written long before their times.

In the conclusion of the very same paragraph of his *Advertisement*, there are two other rash, unfounded assertions of much more importance; for he tells his readers that, "every material objection, which I have adduced against the writings of the New Testament, is to be met with in most of our deistical writers, and has been sufficiently answered times without number." As I have not read the works of many, much less of all the deistical writers, I am not certain that some of them have not urged several of the same objections that I have done. I only know that, without borrowing
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from any other writer whatsoever, I have stated all my objections just as they presented themselves to my own mind, upon a diligent attention to the plain meaning of the several scriptures; and if the same objections, which have induced me to reject as spurious many parts of the ecclesiastical canon, have appeared so strong to other close-reasoning, reflecting men, as to make them renounce the whole of the Christian revelation as fabulous and of mere human device, those scriptures must surely afford more serious grounds for such objections than either Dr. Priestley or Mr. Simpson think proper to confess. But that *every material objection* of mine is to be found in the writings of Deists, though Mr. Simpson has most undeservedly classed me with such avowed unbelievers in divine revelation, as Bolingbroke, Voltaire and Volney, cannot be true; because the strongest and most *material* of my *objections* are deduced from the prophecies of scripture, which every unbelieving deist derides and about which the believing Priestley and Simpson are both totally silent.

Equally false is the assertion also that, those objections *have been answered times without number*. Seventeen years ago, when struck with the conviction of mind produced by studying the prophecies of both covenants, I determined to resign the valuable preferment I then enjoyed in the established church, and to relinquish entirely the clerical profession, I published a letter to the present Bishop of Worcester, which I sent to him, the Archbishop, and several other prelates, demonstrating from the prophecies, that the Church of England is evidently as much the Church of Antichrist as the Church of Rome itself; and in that letter I suggested some

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of the very same objections against the received scriptures, particularly the Gospel of Matthew, which I have now stated more at large in *the Defence*. Another edition of that letter was published in 1792; yet to this hour no answer has appeared to it from any quarter: nor has either of these Gentlemen, who have so violently assailed my publication of last year, thought proper to say one word respecting the arguments founded on that stable ground, the testimony of prophecy. But it is much easier for Mr. Simpson falsely to affirm that objections have been answered, than he would find it to answer them.

In the note inserted in the second page of his Introduction, Mr. Simpson triumphs over and insults the memory of the late Gallican Church, and exclaims that “the Pope of Rome has lost all his influence in that kingdom, never, never to be recovered.” If Mr. Simpson will have patience to await the final issue of the present war, I fancy he will find himself mistaken, and his *Io triumphe!* to be premature. However, though the final destruction of that national Church should not yet have taken place, according to the prophecies of the Gospel, it cannot be at a great distance; and the present disastrous state of that unhappy country is, unquestionably, preparatory to it. And does not Mr. Simpson, who perceives the just but awfully avenging hand of heaven in the ruin of that part of the papal Church, tremble for the fate of the Church of England? Is he so unacquainted with the civil and ecclesiastical history of his own country, since the reformation, and so ignorant of the manner in which most of the North American provinces were peopled from Great Britain, as to think
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that the same spirit of intolerance and inhuman cruelty has not been exerted on the north side of the channel, which he says has so justly drawn down *God's judgments* on the south: Surely he must persuade himself that the religion of the Church of England is essentially and totally different from that of the unhappily deluded Church whose fall he contemplates and remarks upon with complacency and with such perfect self-security. The two Bishops of Osnaburgh and Rochester think much more justly upon this subject. They know that in the great, essential, fundamental articles of their religion the Church of Rome and all the *orthodox* protestant Churches are exactly alike, and the spirit that actuates them the very same: in their *orders*, therefore, issued not long ago to the corps *militant* under their respective banners, they both declared* that, except in the use of a few trifling ceremonies, the Papists differ very little from the members of the English Church, and are their *brethren* in Christ. In truth, both Churches are built upon the same *orthodox* doctrines of the first council of Nice; and, therefore, if either of them is wrong the other cannot be right.

What a powerful *argument* then must it be, that can make a member of the Church of England exult in the destruction of the French Church by those dreadful calamities in which, he says, the *Divine judgments* upon her are made manifest, and yet think his own Church, which is only another subdivision of the self-same Antichristian Church of Constantine, secure from a similar impending fate!

* See in all the newspapers, the orders to the British troops on their first going into quarters this winter, and Bp. H.aley's letter to the clergy of St. David's.

fate! To men thus astonishingly infatuated in vain does the heavenly voice of prophecy forewarn them that inevitable destruction, sooner or later, awaits every such Church; in vain does it so pathetically call aloud to the deceived, but well intending members of the various sections of that Church of Antichrist, "*Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*"

The only comfort I receive as an Englishman under so alarming a prospect, arises from the same voice of prophetic revelation; for it seems to teach us (Apoc. xvii. 16.) that some of the kings of Europe who have so long protected and maintained her, at length, "*shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire.*" That is, in plain language, shall detest the Antichristian Church they have so long established and upheld, strip her of her wealth and power, apply her revenues to civil uses and abolish her for ever. As the critical period approaches, I hope, and from many circumstances am induced to think it highly probable that *our* rulers will be found of that prudent number, and will have timely wisdom enough by a spontaneous accomplishment of the prediction, at once to lighten the heavy load of debt, which now oppresses the nation, and avert from Great Britain such complicated evils as at present afflict our unhappy neighbours, even the distant view of which is sufficient to shock the feelings of every humane heart, not hardened by the selfish spirit of enthusiastic bigotry or political ambition.

That Mr. Simpson's ideas of Christianity and mine are diametrically opposite is sufficiently obvious.

vious. To me, the Gospel is a new, univereal covenant proposed by our merciful creator to influence and reform the moral conduct of mankind, and effect their welfare and happiness, in the present world, to the greatest, possible degree. On the part of man, the terms of this covenant are, temperance and the moderation of sensual enjoyments within the bounds of equity and reason, the habitual practice of every social virtue, and above all, a constant, affectionate benevolence to *all* his fellow creatures. On the part of God, the blessings of his providence in this, and immortality and perfect happiness in a future life, are assured to those who perform the human terms of the covenant, and to none other. Such a religion as this is plain and clear and intelligible to a child: the performance or non-performance of the conditions is a matter that can be settled only between the Almighty and every man's own conscience; there is, therefore, neither use nor room for the intervention of a priest between them. To Mr. Simpson, and all those of whose religion the doctrine of atonement is *the chief corner stone*, the Gospel is the glad-tidings of a mysterious charm or amulet, which pre-supposing the impracticability of a moral reformation of the world in general, and even of individuals, is sufficiently efficacious to make a *full and perfect satisfaction* to the Deity for the commission of every species of cruelty, wickedness and immorality; and to assure the *boary sinner*, even at the last hour of his ill-spent life, of all the glorious promises of futurity, if he can but bring himself, with emphasis and due solemnity of grimace, to repeat the prescribed, mystic ABRACADABRA, *secundum artem Sacerdotis*. The question is, which of us is
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in the right? Our own opinion certainly cannot equitably decide it: but there is a criterion by which the world at large may fairly judge between us.

Was a man travelling on an expedition of the highest importance to him, through any country, in which were two roads, the one only capable of conducting him to his wished-for object, whilst the other, if he once deviated into it, would soon mislead him in a quite contrary direction; he would undoubtedly rejoice to have a perfect directory put into his hands, not only informing him how to travel in the right road, but also containing the fullest admonition and descriptive information of the several marks, by which he might distinguish the wrong; and, if he was wise, he would so thoroughly acquaint himself with all those peculiar characters, that he might securely pursue his journey, certain of being in the right road.

Such a journey all men mean to travel through the paths of their religion; and to Christians such a directory are the authentic scriptures of the two covenants. The prophecies of those sacred books, especially those of the New Covenant, form that part of the directory in particular, which contains the descriptive marks and warnings by which alone we can discern the difference between the ways of Christ and those of Antichrist. He therefore who does not so clearly understand that important part of the directory, as to be able to explain and point out all those tokens of the fatal antichristian deviation, which have, as yet, occurred to the present and preceding ages, is so far from being qualified to be a guide to others, that
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he can have no rational satisfaction of being in the right road of Christianity himself.

Well convinced of this plain truth, I have long turned my studious attention to the meaning of the Christian prophecies; and have received from them, to my own mind, the satisfactory intelligence that was to be expected. I have already stated to the public, what I understand to be the objects of the most material parts of those prophecies; and have it now in contemplation, if the very extraordinary circumstances of the present times will permit me safely to do so, to publish a regular consistent explanation of that truly important, but strangely disregarded book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Let Mr. Simpson then or any other clergyman of whatsoever rank or sect, who accuses me of error and a misrepresentation of the scriptures, publish a more rational, satisfactory interpretation of the same prophecies; shew us that they are not completed in the objects to which I have applied them; and point out to us what other religion but that of the *orthodox* Church of Constantine, in some countries under the papal, in others under a protestant form, has been established by the civil power above 1200 years, within that pollarchy of separate states which arose out of the ruins of the western empire, and did not embrace, much less begin to establish that religion, in their several dominions, before the sixth century of the Christian æra. If Mr. Simpson will perform this, the world will see, and I will readily acknowledge that, he understands the sacred scriptures much better than I do. On the contrary, if he is unable clearly to expound those prophecies, as far as they have been already fulfilled, it is not possible for him to distinguish Christ from Antichrist;

Antichrist; nor to understand that Gospel he presumes to preach. And, if so, to say nothing of the dangerous, as well as illiberal, *charlatanery* of a man's making a gain by professing to instruct others in a most important science of which he himself is ignorant, his case is, at best, only that of a *blind leader of the blind*, and to such the only prospect, that I can find, afforded in the holy scriptures is that,* *they shall both fall into the pit.*

* Luke vi. 39.

F I N I S.



